

A Wilderness-Forever Future: A Short History of the National Wilderness Preservation System

by Douglas W. Scott, Policy Director, Campaign for America's Wilderness

INTRODUCTION - The American Wilderness Vision

Here is an American wilderness vision: the vision of “a wilderness-forever future.” This is not my phrase; it is Howard Zahniser’s. And it is not my vision, but the one that I inherited, and that you, too, have inherited, from wilderness advocates and stewards who went before.

A Wilderness-Forever Future. It is the core idea in the Wilderness Act, which holds out the promise of “an enduring resource of wilderness.” It is the idea of saving wilderness forever—in perpetuity.

In Perpetuity. Dwell a moment on that idea. As Zahniser—who drafted the Wilderness Act and led the campaign for its enactment—said: “The wilderness that has come to us from the eternity of the past, we have the boldness to project into the eternity of the future.”¹

Today this may seem obvious and worthy, but the goal of preserving American wilderness in perpetuity was not always so obvious. The vision of a wilderness-forever future, and the ambition to extend it to millions of acres of federal lands across America, evolved as America’s wilderness movement arose and evolved.

Once this goal began to be seriously advocated as a special plan for certain federal lands, the great question was how to realistically go about saving wilderness in perpetuity. In the 1920s, wilderness advocates searched for practical ways to secure wilderness. Ultimately, in the late 1940s, they decided to turn to Congress, seeking statutory protection when they became convinced that relying upon administrative promises of protection could not secure wilderness in the long run—in *perpetuity*.

Today, you and I, and thousands like us, share enormous aspirations in our work of wilderness protection, whether as advocates for designation of additional wilderness areas or as agency officials charged with the stewardship of those lands Congress has designated as wilderness (and those lands directed to be studied for possible designation, but on which Congress has yet to render decision, including millions of acres in units of the National Park System).

THE WILDERNESS IDEA - The Need for Wilderness

The pioneers who helped shape the earliest steps toward practical wilderness preservation shared a passionate conviction that wilderness is not some luxury, but a vital bulwark in our individual lives and in the life of our culture, our very civilization. Their breakthrough concept was to link the existence of ecological wholeness to human well-being and to American culture.

These gifted thinkers saw a fundamental *need* for wilderness, not principally for recreational use or scientific study, but for character-shaping and life-ennobling—for sustaining the unique American character shaped by our national encounter with the wild frontier. To Aldo Leopold, wilderness was nothing less than a “fundamental instrument for building citizens.”² In founding The Wilderness Society in 1935, he and his colleagues asserted:

... wilderness (the environment of solitude) is a natural mental resource having the same basic relationship to man’s ultimate thought and culture as coal, timber, and other physical resources have to his material needs.³

Recognition of this fundamental value of wilderness was an American concept. It was a new thing to see the pristine natural world not as mere background or raw material (or idealized as an artfully-landscaped, pastoral English garden) but as the essential fabric of a distinctive American culture. Prominent writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, and John Muir, joined poets like William Cullen Bryant, painters such as Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran, and the pioneer land-

scape photographers, building on European Romanticism to define and popularize the distinct cultural values of wild nature.

Wilderness Vanishing

The pioneering wilderness advocates also realized that the wilderness was fast *disappearing*. The drive to settle the great expanse of the continent, hugely accelerated by the coming of the automobile, meant the remnants of wilderness were eroding away. In 1935 Leopold wrote:

This country has been swinging the hammer of development so long and so hard that it has forgotten the anvil of wilderness which gave value and significance to its labors. The momentum of our blows is so unprecedented that the remaining remnant of wilderness will be pounded into road-dust long before we find out its values.⁴

Bob Marshall echoed Leopold:

Wilderness is melting away like some last snowbank on some south-facing mountainside during a hot afternoon in June. It is disappearing while most of those who care more for it than anything else in the world are trying desperately to rally and save it.⁵

In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold wrote that the wild things wilderness lovers seek have eluded their grasp and they hope “by some necromancy of laws, appropriations, regional plans, reorganization of departments, or other form of mass-wishing to make them stay put.”⁶

The early history of wilderness preservation can be described as an increasingly frantic effort to find the most effective “form of mass-wishing” to make wilderness “stay put,” even as it was rapidly “melting away.”

National Parks and Wilderness

One important root of the effort to protect wilderness is found in the history of our national parks in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The parks were the first concerted federal effort to preserve great expanses of wildland for their natural values. With the inspiration of John Muir and the leadership of Stephen Mather, first director of the National Park Service—and fueled by the profit motive of tourism-minded western railroads—the system of national parks expanded rapidly into the 1930s.⁷

However, many wilderness advocates soon soured on the tool of national parks as a means for really preserving wilderness. In 1921, Leopold wrote that while it might be well and proper that “the Parks are being networked with roads and trails as rapidly as possible,” for this reason of tourist boosterism the parks could not be the means of preserving true wilderness.⁸ Despite efforts to hold onto wilderness values in the parks, in 1937 Bob Marshall complained in a memo to FDR’s secretary of the interior, Harold Ickes, that in their enthusiasm for trail building, machinery, and large crowds, “the Park Service seems to have forgotten the primitive.”⁹

Aldo Leopold

Aldo Leopold was responsible for the earliest U.S. Forest Service initiatives recognizing the value of wilderness areas—as *wilderness*. It is notable that he, Marshall, and other early advocates for wilderness policy were trained scientists, looking way beyond the obvious value of wilderness for recreational use.

In his landmark article in the *Journal of Forestry* in 1921, Leopold praised the progress of national forest development, but noted that it:

. . . has already gone far enough to raise the question of whether the policy of development . . . should continue to govern in absolutely every instance, or whether the principle of the highest use does not itself demand that representative portions of some forests be preserved as wilderness.¹⁰

What was needed, Leopold urged, was “a definite national policy for the permanent establishment of wilderness recreation grounds.”

Leopold was the moving force behind the 1924 Forest Service regional decision to set aside the Gila Wilderness Area as a temporary wilderness reserve—the nation’s first. He evangelized about wilderness, not only within the Forest Service and in professional journals, but also in popular magazines such as *Sunset* and *American Forests & Forest Life*.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A WILDERNESS PRESERVATION POLICY - L-20 Regulation—“Primitive Areas”

Building on Leopold’s advocacy, by the mid-1920s the chief of the Forest Service, William B. Greeley, told employees that the wilderness idea had “merit and deserves careful study” and that he was making plans “to withhold these areas against unnecessary road building” and protect their wilderness character.¹¹

Greeley ordered an inventory of undeveloped national forest areas, undertaken by assistant forester for lands, Leon F. Kneipp. This led to the 1929 promulgation of the Forest Service’s “L-20” regulation, the first policy for wilderness preservation, applicable to national forest lands. It adopted the term *primitive areas* for these lands. The stated purpose of L-20 was “to maintain primitive conditions of transportation, subsistence, habitation, and environment to the fullest degree compatible with their highest public use with a view to conserving the values of such areas for purposes of public education and recreation.”¹²

However, these primitive areas were no real answer to the goal of preserving wilderness in perpetuity. Nothing about the L-20 regulation actually prohibited any form of development or use, including road building and logging. These life-or-death decisions for wilderness were left largely to the discretion of Forest Service personnel in the field, many of whom had no particular orientation or sympathy for the wilderness idea. As Forest Service instructions sent to the field specified:

The establishment of a primitive area ordinarily will not operate to withdraw timber, forage or water resources from industrial use, since the utilization of such resources, if properly regulated, will not be incompatible with the purposes for which the area is designated.¹³

Forest Wilderness or National Parks?

In the 1930s, rivalry between the Forest Service (in the Department of Agriculture) and the National Park Service (in the Department of the Interior) was especially fierce.¹⁴ In part this owed to Interior Secretary Ickes’s undisguised efforts to get President Franklin Roosevelt to transfer the national forests to the Department of the Interior, a move bitterly resisted by the U.S. Forest Service and its timber industry allies. An additional source of bureaucratic rivalry was the threat—and reality—that Congress might be persuaded to designate wild portions of the national forests as new national parks.

One Forest Service partisan, H. H. Chapman of the Yale School of Forestry, reported the rivalry in strictly wilderness terms, in the *Journal of Forestry* in 1938:

. . . a terrific drive is on by the National Park Service, to capture and capitalize the sentiment back of the wilderness idea, and with this backing to secure as parks, the 11 million acres of wilderness or ‘primitive’ areas already established within the National Forests One of the most pressing arguments used is the assumed precarious status of any area set aside for a wilderness solely by executive orders of the [Chief] Forester or Secretary of Agriculture I felt that wilderness areas should be given legal status by acts of Congress, but that . . . they should remain as integral portions of the National Forests and not be transferred and take park status, to be subjected to the pressure for development which is desecrating so many of our most prized National Parks like the Yellowstone and Sequoia.¹⁵

Chapman neatly captured both sides of the argument. To Forest Service partisans, the best defense against national park takeovers was to argue that in national parks the wilderness would be “desecrated” by National Park Service overdevelopment for tourism. To park advocates, the Forest Service

primitive areas had no real security and could be abolished at the stroke of a pen, whereas national parks had protection by statutory law (if not from developments by the National Park Service itself).

Wilderness advocates astutely encouraged this who-can-best-protect-wilderness debate, for it could only encourage stronger wilderness policies by *both* agencies.¹⁶

The National Park Service won most of these battles. Olympic National Park and Kings Canyon National Park were established in 1938 and 1940, respectively, each embracing areas that had been national forest primitive areas.¹⁷ Each was the subject of national controversy, with the who-can-best-protect-wilderness arguments dominating later stages of the congressional debates. In these debates, Secretary Ickes sought to deflect the parks-will-be-overdeveloped Forest Service defense by announcing his policy that the wilderness within the new parks would not be developed, while he lambasted the weakness of the Forest Service's wilderness efforts. The sponsor of the Kings Canyon park bill, which at that point specified it was to be a "wilderness park," attacked the inconstancy of Forest Service primitive area protection:

[Chief Forester] Silcox told us when he testified that it is by his order a wilderness area now. Yes, gentlemen, he made it a wilderness area with a stroke of his pen. His successor, with another stroke of another pen can undo all that he did. There is no security when your rights are based on regulations that may be made today and repealed tomorrow If you make this a national park the maintenance of the wilderness characteristic . . . will not be dependent upon the whim of any man but will be fixed by law.¹⁸

That last point was not exactly true. Therefore, to more effectively counter the Forest Service line of attack, Secretary Ickes went a step further, causing a generic national park wilderness protection bill to be drafted and introduced in Congress in 1939—the first national wilderness legislation. Ickes's legislation set the goal of preserving "perpetually for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States the primitive conditions existing within national parks and national monuments." It authorized the President to proclaim "wilderness areas when he determines that it would be to the public interest to do so."¹⁹ Though a Senate hearing was held, Ickes's legislation ultimately languished, having served its strategic purpose of countering the Forest Service argument during the final stages of the Kings Canyon fight.

Bob Marshall

In the 1930s, a new champion took up the leadership of the wilderness movement, the enormously energetic Robert Marshall. Marshall was an extraordinary apostle, passionately preaching the cause of wilderness, gathering acolytes wherever he went in his far-flung travels. Following in Muir and Leopold's steps, he wrote widely about wilderness, not only in journals like *The Scientific Monthly*, but also in popular publications like *Nature Magazine* and *The New York Times Magazine*.

Marshall became chief forester of the Office of Indian Affairs in the Interior Department, where he peppered Secretary Ickes with memoranda promoting wilderness preservation. In 1934 he was urging "a nationwide wilderness plan," involving areas on the national forests, national parks, lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and Indian lands.²⁰ A month later, he sent Ickes a memorandum outlining a "Suggested Program for Preservation of Wilderness Areas," urging creation of a Wilderness Planning Board to select the areas. To assure maximum protection, he advocated that the selected areas be designated by act of Congress, noting: "This would give them as close an approximation to permanence as could be realized in a world of shifting desires."²¹

U-Regulations—"Wilderness" and "Wild Areas"

In 1937, Marshall transferred to head of the lands division of the Forest Service, using the position as a one-man internal lobbyist for wilderness preservation. His major achievement was a far stronger set of Forest Service wilderness regulations, the "U" regulations promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture in September 1939.²²

The U regulations were motivated in no small part by the political need of the Forest Service to offer a stronger form of wilderness protection in the face of rivalry over proposed new national parks. Marshall assiduously pressed this line of argument in the internal Forest Service debate that culminated in the new regulations.²³ They replaced the decade-old L-20 regulation with much clearer, higher-level protection for what were now to be called *wilderness areas* (and, if under 100,000 acres, *wild areas*). The legal security of these areas was somewhat enhanced by elevating their approval—and any subsequent boundary changes or declassifications—to decision by the Secretary (for the wilderness areas; boundary changes for the smaller wild areas could be approved by the Chief). Logging and road building were to be excluded. The new policy required that all the old L-20 primitive areas be reevaluated and boundaries reconsidered, with public hearings, before they would be reclassified as wilderness or wild areas.

The Wilderness Society

Even as he agitated for wilderness from within the government, Marshall knew that wilderness needed a stronger push from outside forces. He had asserted, in 1930:

There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness.²⁴

Fulfilling this need, Marshall was the central force around which The Wilderness Society was organized in 1935. With his independent financial means, he was also its main financial supporter.

Over the next decades The Wilderness Society was the philosophical and political focal point for the growing national wilderness movement. Its governing council and staff comprised a rare brain trust, bringing together the foundational thinkers of the wilderness movement. Just imagine the fine wilderness talk among Leopold, Marshall, his brothers George and James Marshall, Robert Sterling Yard, Harvey Broome, Olaus and Mardy Murie, Benton MacKaye, Ernest Griffith, Howard Zahniser, Dick Leonard, Sigurd Olson, Stewart Brandborg, and others. The annual meetings of this extraordinary group, and their rich correspondence, along with the biennial wilderness conferences the Sierra Club began holding in 1949, were the great crucibles of wilderness thought and action in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION: HOW PERMANENT?

Tragically, Bob Marshall died in November 1939—he was only thirty-eight-years old. The wilderness movement lost the leader who Robert Sterling Yard, the first staff member of The Wilderness Society, said had been “the most effective weapon of preservation in existence.”²⁵

With Bob Marshall’s passing, the torch of intellectual and strategic leadership for wilderness shifted even more from the federal agencies to the outside—to citizen advocacy groups. The leaders of The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, Izaak Walton League, National Parks Association, and National Wildlife Federation were a small, close-knit fraternity. Having relied so completely on Marshall’s energetic leadership as a Forest Service insider, they felt his loss keenly. They increasingly saw the federal land management agencies as too weak, too beholden to commercial interests and local pressures, and too subject to the shifting political winds to be counted on to truly preserve wilderness—in perpetuity. Writing to Olaus Murie less than a year after Marshall’s death, Harvey Broome, a Wilderness Society founder, made it explicit:

After Bob Marshall died, I came to realize, and I guess it is the experience of all members of the [Wilderness Society] Council, how much I relied upon his immense knowledge. Since his death I have been wondering just how permanent and legally inviolable are the various wilderness areas in this country. What is to hinder some future Secretary from abrogating those Regulations? . . .

Do you think wildernesses would have more permanence if there were some new status, established by congressional enactment?²⁶

These leaders saw the Forest Service and National Park Service weakening wilderness protection in case after case, siding with commercial interests to lop off a bit of wilderness here, another bit there, encouraging development that eroded roadless wildlands.

Wilderness in the National Parks?

In the national parks, it seemed to be open season on wilderness, with conservationists rushing from one defensive battle to another. Commercial interests were proposing logging in Olympic National Park and dam-building projects seemingly everywhere. The National Park Service hierarchy, afire with enthusiasm for recreational development, was contemplating ever more tourism facilities. Notwithstanding Secretary Ickes's efforts, wilderness advocates remained deeply skeptical of National Park Service protection of wilderness within the parks. The National Park Service resolutely resisted adopting any explicit or lasting delineation of wilderness areas within the parks. As National Park Service pioneer turned Wilderness Society president Robert Sterling Yard wrote in 1940:

While national parks appeared to be changing standards in a passionate policy of play, national forests are developing, in their wilderness areas, a strictly limited system of natural museums made possible by the absolute exclusion of roads and all that roads imply.²⁷

This dissatisfaction with the National Park Service by wilderness advocates continued in the following decades. Michael McCloskey, long-time Sierra Club executive director, summed up this history:

Eventually master plans were prepared for national parks showing the ultimate limit of planned developments, but in the framework of this planning, wilderness seemed to be viewed mainly as the land left over in planning. Rather than being positively identified as a value in its own right, wilderness became the residuum in master planning.²⁸

Wilderness in the National Forests?

Yard's 1940 enthusiasm for Forest Service wilderness policy was short-lived. And, as the 1940s and 1950s unfolded, wilderness proponents' faith in the new level of administrative protection for national forest wilderness totally collapsed in the face of contrary on-the-ground experience. Each time one of the old *primitive* areas was reclassified as *wilderness* or *wild*, the boundaries were revised. More often than not, even though the gross acreage might remain the same or even be expanded a little, the quality of the wilderness was whittled away. High-elevation rocks and ice were added to replace lower-elevation timberlands removed at the behest of logging interests. As Leopold said: "A paper profit and a physical loss."²⁹

John Barnard of the Sierra Club observed, in 1956, on the eve of the Wilderness Bill campaign, that:

. . . many people will be surprised that protection of America's [national forest] wilderness rests on so slim a base as these regulations Theoretically, America's wilderness areas could be wiped out by the stroke of the Secretary of Agriculture's pen even though public sentiment did not favor it.³⁰

"Not by Law"

To wilderness leaders, it was unacceptable to see wilderness policy lurch along in so insecure and haphazard a way. Wilderness had to be saved, securely, once and for all—in perpetuity. A stronger means simply had to be found to protect it, something inherently more permanent than the administrative discretion either the National Park Service or the Forest Service could promise. Kenneth Reid, editor and general manager of the Izaak Walton League, wrote in 1939:

There is no assurance that any one of them [wilderness areas], or all of them, might not be abolished as they were created—by administrative decree. They exist by sufferance and administrative policy—not by law.³¹

THE OUTLOOK FOR WILDERNESS: 1940

So, what was the outlook for wilderness, then, in the early 1940s? And what was the posture of the wilderness movement?

- *There was no national policy to preserve wilderness*, to recognize wilderness itself as a resource of value and to protect wilderness across all the federal agencies that managed wildlands.
- *There was no definition of wilderness*, no agreed-upon practical standard.
- *There was no nationwide system of wilderness areas*, formulated with rational foresight of the kind Leopold and Marshall had advocated. A few agencies had delineated a few wilderness areas; others ignored the wilderness values of the lands in their jurisdiction.
- *There was no consistent management guidance* for those relatively few areas that had been classified as wilderness.
- Wilderness preservation policy, such as it was, was still *dominated by the federal agencies*, who all too often bowed to powerful development or parochial political pressures.
- There was absolutely no commitment to preserve wilderness *in perpetuity*.
- And *the wilderness movement was stuck on the defensive*, trying to hang onto remnants of wilderness.

HOWARD ZAHNISER AND THE WILDERNESS BILL - The Idea of a Comprehensive Wilderness Program

Facing a bleak and utterly unacceptable outlook for the permanence of wilderness, and out of their ever-growing dissatisfaction with the wilderness commitment of either the National Park Service or the Forest Service, wilderness leaders proceeded, if only in fits and starts, to lay out a comprehensive, positive program for a stronger, better, more secure answer for wilderness preservation.

Aldo Leopold had been the first to promote—in 1925—a vision of a “definite national policy,” advocating a *system* of wilderness areas embracing portions of both national forests and national parks. Marshall built on this—in 1934—with his vision for “a nationwide wilderness plan” involving lands of the national forests, national parks, the public domain lands administered by what is now the Bureau of Land Management, Indian reservations, and state and private lands. Today, this idea of a national *system* of protected lands seems perfectly obvious, but it was not always so. As historian Donald Swain credits Robert Sterling Yard, who was the chief publicist for the national parks in the early years of the century for masterminding “a kind of rhetorical strategy designed to build a feeling of unity toward the parks. By originating terms such as ‘National Park System,’ he helped reduce the chances of one unit of the ‘system’ being successfully attacked.”³²

In his 1934 memo to Secretary Ickes, Bob Marshall had suggested the need for protecting wilderness areas by statutory law, a point Kenneth Reid echoed in his 1939 Izaak Walton League article. Out of bitter experience and disappointment, by the end of World War II wilderness leaders were looking in earnest for a stronger, surer way to preserve wilderness—in perpetuity.

Howard Zahniser

Robert Sterling Yard died at age 84 in 1945, working to the last from his apartment bedroom as the president and editor (and one of only two staff members) of The Wilderness Society. Into the leadership of our movement then came Howard Zahniser, a man whose personality and skills turned out to be ideal for the wilderness challenge of his times. A scholarly man, “Zahnie,” as he was affectionately known by thousands of wilderness supporters, was recruited from a secure government job as an editor to take over Yard’s position as executive secretary of The Wilderness Society. Zahniser, a charter member of the Society, was teamed with Olaus Murie, who served as half-time director, based in Moose, Wyoming, ably abetted by his wife, Mardy. Harvey Broome was later to eulogize “this brilliant team,” under whose leadership “the concept of wilderness became an imperative in American life.”³³

As Zahniser and Murie began their tenure, the development pressures of America's postwar economic boom were just beginning to mushroom. In 1945 Murie, a widely respected wildlife biologist, sized up the threat for wilderness:

According to present plans, we must not remain satisfied with America as we have known it. The blueprints virtually postulate 'lifting the face of Nature.' The new dams proposed are so numerous they cannot be conveniently listed. It is known that many of them would affect wildlife resources to an alarming degree. Many, with accompanying roads, would invade wilderness areas. Never before has there been a greater threat to what remains of primeval America.³⁴

Facing this threat, Zahniser's vision—built on yeasty discussions within the brain trust of The Wilderness Society's governing council—was, almost from the start of his work in 1945, the vision of wilderness preserved *by law*. A federal wilderness law.

Zahniser's personal experiences in the Adirondack Forest Preserve of New York, beginning in 1946, when he first backpacked in its High Peaks region and then purchased a family cabin in the southern Adirondacks, showed him the merits of strong legal protection. The wilderness of the Adirondacks is protected by provisions in the New York state constitution. His friend Paul Schaefer later wrote of their High Peaks trips that Zahniser had spoken of the "forever wild" provision of the New York Constitution (a provision in which Bob Marshall's father had played an instrumental role) as the type of strong legal protection needed for wilderness at the national level.³⁵

Imagining a Wilderness Law

Zahniser's initial experience with wildland legislation on Capitol Hill came with legislation drafted by Wilderness Society president Benton MacKaye, who had originated the idea of the Appalachian Trail. MacKaye's 1945 legislative proposal was for a national system of trails "constructed, developed and maintained in manner which will preserve as far as possible the wilderness values of the areas traversed."³⁶ A year later, he broadened his idea and sought to have the sponsor of the earlier bill, Representative Daniel K. Hoch (Democrat of Pennsylvania), introduce a bill for a nationwide system of "wilderness belts" to be located along mountain ranges and rivers. It was, MacKaye wrote to Congressman Hoch, a melding of ideas: "*national* system vs. regional, and *area* vs. line (or trail)."³⁷ To Zahniser, who delivered MacKaye's letter and draft legislation to the congressman, he wrote:

We have here the chance perhaps to launch a constructive national legislative campaign. This could form the basis for a broadside attack by the Wilderness Society toward the capture of a real wilderness domain. It would make a definitive maneuver to shift our ground from the defense to the offensive—from less negative to more positive action.³⁸

The draft wilderness belts bill went no further, but it planted an important seed.

To even imagine a wilderness law, much less to seriously imagine enacting it, was an act of supreme vision, for in that period of our national history the obstacles were daunting indeed. Wilderness preservation was not yet an idea in the mainstream, and it ran counter to the non-activist, pro-development spirit of the post-war era. Zahniser saw that obtaining such a law would take an unparalleled effort. It would require far broader support—and many more voices—than merely the then-few thousand members of the small national wilderness groups, and a more concerted strategy than just to draft a bill and give it to one sympathetic member of Congress.

Nor was there then any meeting of the minds among the broader community of conservation groups about such a law being needed—or, if needed, what it might look like, and whether the time was right to seriously pursue it.

As a preliminary step in his campaign, Zahniser arranged for a congressman from Ohio to request that the Library of Congress prepare a thorough study of the nation's wilderness needs and opportunities. The Library's Legislative Reference Service published this study as a congressional document in

1949.³⁹ (The study was helped along its way by the fact that the director of the Legislative Reference Service, Ernest Griffith, was also a founding member of The Wilderness Society’s governing council.)

Building Consensus

As he prepared his input for the Library of Congress study—a masterful treatise drawing together the essence and detail of the wilderness idea—Zahniser was working out in his own mind the conceptual outline for a practical and politically viable wilderness law—and the arguments to support such a proposal.⁴⁰ He first laid out his case for a wilderness law in his banquet speech at the Sierra Club’s Second Biennial Wilderness Conference in 1951:

Let’s try to be done with a wilderness preservation program made up of a sequence of overlapping emergencies, threats and defense campaigns! Let’s make a concerted effort for a positive program that will establish an enduring system of areas where we can be at peace and not forever feel that the wilderness is a battleground.⁴¹

But 1951 was not yet the time to launch the positive campaign for a wilderness law. More work was needed to quietly build the consensus of conservation organizations that would be needed if such a proposal were to have any prayer of enactment by Congress.

Echo Park

At that juncture along came a wilderness fight so big and so fundamental that Zahniser soon recognized that winning it, if this were possible, could create the perfect political fulcrum with which to leverage the coalition and political strength a wilderness law would require. It was a fight about fundamentals, about keeping faith with the dedication of lands for preservation. And it was to prove epochal in its impacts on the character and capabilities of America’s nascent environmental movement.

This catalytic wilderness campaign was the Echo Park fight, far the most significant conservation fight of the twentieth century. Yes, the campaign for the Wilderness Act itself was of huge importance. And, yes, the 1970s Alaska lands campaign dwarfed all other conservation campaigns in the size of what was at stake and the scale of the wilderness movement’s lobbying efforts. But those later battles were won with the strategic and tactical tools the post-war generation of conservation leaders forged and perfected in the epochal Echo Park campaign, when they had far fewer resources of members, staff, and dollars.

Echo Park dam was to be just one part of a vast billion-dollar scheme of federal dams across the Colorado Plateau. The Bureau of Reclamation and western politicians saw no reason to deter them from siting this dam in the little-visited backcountry of the obscure Dinosaur National Monument, known—if at all—for its dinosaur bones, not its wilderness river. Yet where this dam proposal and this wild river collided, in a spectacular canyon setting known as Echo Park, fundamental conservation history was made.

Our movement, then tiny in size and resources, fought the proposed Echo Park dam as a matter of principle—whether national park lands were indeed sacrosanct from such development. Using Robert Sterling Yard’s rhetorical stratagem, conservation leaders argued that if a dam could be built in any one unit of the National Park *System*, however obscure, it would be a death blow to the integrity of that entire System—and thus to every national park and all wilderness, everywhere. The issue was, do we keep our commitments to preservation?

The Echo Park fight was no isolated, one-time campaign. Both sides knew the stakes. Richard Leonard, a board member of both The Wilderness Society and Sierra Club, pointed out: “[I]f we win on [the national park system integrity] issue our battle may be won for the next 25 years, while if we win on other grounds (economic, for example) then we have not necessarily won a national park victory.”⁴² On the other side, western Colorado Representative Wayne N. Aspinall (Democrat) said: “If we let them knock out Echo Park dam, we’ll hand them a tool they’ll use for the next hundred years.”⁴³ Both were correct.

In a five-year, come-from-behind battle against all odds, the conservationists won.⁴⁴ In the process, they built up their own advocacy capabilities as never before. In this campaign, they found new allies in a broadened coalition for wilderness, cultivating many new congressional champions and developed national media impact. They mastered new techniques for grassroots mobilization, including the first campaign book and the first use of a full-page newspaper advertisement.

In the aftermath of their victory in protecting Echo Park and the integrity of the National Park System, wilderness conservationists earned new respect in the halls of Congress, with a seasoned leadership team led by Zahniser and Sierra Club executive director David Brower. Equally important was the fact that wilderness advocates had gained an entirely new level of self-confidence in their own advocacy abilities and in the scale of public support they could rally for wilderness.

To Zahniser, the Echo Park fight had been “the test whether any designation can long endure. We passed that test.”⁴⁵ From the outset of the Echo Park campaign, he deliberately sought to script it as his vehicle for building the broader coalition and political credibility he knew were needed to launch his long-dreamed-of campaign for the Wilderness Bill and the National Wilderness Preservation System.

THE WILDERNESS BILL

As the Echo Park campaign reached its climax in 1955, Zahniser used speaking opportunities to lay out the case for a wilderness bill. That March he spoke to the Fourth Biennial Wilderness Conference of the Sierra Club. Of this meeting, Sierra Club leader Charlotte Mauk wrote:

It was obvious that the individuals and groups present were ready to say ‘O.K.—we understand one another now and we have a pretty good idea of what we want. Let’s go after it!’⁴⁶

In May 1955, Zahniser addressed the National Citizen’s Planning Conference on Parks and Open Spaces in Washington, D.C. It was his opportunity to lay out the case for a broader audience. His topic was “The Need for Wilderness Areas.” We need, he said:

. . . areas of the earth within which we stand without our mechanisms that make us immediate masters over our environment—areas of wild nature in which we sense ourselves to be, what in fact I believe we are, dependent members of an interdependent community of living creatures that together derive their existence from the sun.

By very definition this wilderness is a need. The idea of wilderness as an area without man’s influence is man’s own concept. Its values are human values. Its preservation is a purpose that arises out of man’s own sense of his fundamental needs.⁴⁷

“We need congressional action,” Zahniser concluded. He outlined the provisions of a wilderness law, urging, “we should move forward as steadily as we can toward this action.”

The deal by which conservationists won the Echo Park fight was formally sealed in an exchange of letters between Zahniser and western members of Congress in late January 1956. A week later, Zahniser sat down to write out the first draft of the Wilderness Bill in longhand. His draft was soon shared with close confidants—George Marshall, Dave Brower, Charles Callison, Stewart Brandborg, and Mike Nadel.

When Zahniser unveiled the draft bill (by that time it was his 10th, much refined draft) in a speech to the first Northwest Wilderness Conference of the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs in April 1956, the *Oregon Journal* editorialized: “Zahniser’s presentation of his wilderness philosophy was like a stone tossed into a pool. It has been gaining converts ever since.”⁴⁸

The wilderness bill went through seventeen drafts in that busy spring of 1956, with Zahniser the midwife for every word. As a draftsman, Zahniser sought to make the bill itself convey the deeper values of wilderness, to be in effect its own best lobbying tool. While struggling with some of the more complex technical language, he wrote to George Marshall: “I am no bill drafter. If I had to do this again, I would much prefer to state all this in iambic rhyming couplets or even in the sequence of sonnets, than attempt to do this in bill language.”⁴⁹ In fact, the poet in Zahniser made him the ideal draftsman. The masterful, evocative phrases of today’s Wilderness Act were shaped then, at the outset, by Zahniser’s pen.

Even as he was pouring over the bill drafts, Zahniser was building public support, using a favorite device. He enlisted Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (Democrat of Minnesota), an ally from the Echo Park fight, to place the text of his 1955 “The Need for Wilderness Areas” speech in the *Congressional Record*, from which he then had it reprinted in booklet form. Tens of thousands of these were mailed by Humphrey’s office to the membership lists of conservation organizations, inviting readers to send him their comments on Zahniser’s proposal for a wilderness law. Those comments, in turn, were collated by Zahniser’s editorial assistant, Michael Nadel, and became the basis for yet another Humphrey congressional speech. It, too, was reprinted and mailed far and wide, even as the bill drafting work was at its most intense stage. The seedbed for grassroots support of the bill was being carefully prepared.

Simultaneously, Zahniser and his closest colleagues were methodically gathering a new consensus of support among the broader cadre of leaders of America’s conservation organizations. George Marshall told Zahniser that spring:

It is amazing what you have accomplished educationally, literarily, editorially, legislatively, with administrators, and organizationally. Perhaps most significant is the way you have helped and taught wilderness preservers how to work together.⁵⁰

In June 1956, the Wilderness Bill was ready. It was introduced in the Senate by Senator Humphrey and in the House of Representatives by a stalwart from the Echo Park campaign, Representative John Saylor (Republican of Pennsylvania)—a bipartisan measure from the outset. The Wilderness Society arranged to have Humphrey and Saylor’s introductory speeches and the full text of the bill reprinted as booklets, which were then mailed out to tens of thousands, augmenting conservation magazines in spreading the word and, importantly, placing the actual text of the Wilderness Bill in the hands of conservation-minded Americans in every congressional district.

THE EIGHT-YEAR CAMPAIGN

It took eight years to pass the Wilderness Bill in the face of the onslaught of opposition by western resource development interests and conservative western members of Congress—and by leaders of the Forest Service and National Park Service and the Eisenhower administration. President John F. Kennedy came into office in 1961 with the Wilderness Bill part of his party’s platform. Support of the new administration, led by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman muted agency opposition and tipped the balance in the Democratic-controlled Congress.⁵¹

Even so, the bill was subject to unusually lengthy review. One Senate opponent recalled: “Perhaps there is no other act that was scanned and perused and discussed as thoroughly as every sentence in the Wilderness Act.”⁵² As Mike McCloskey summed it up: “Some sixty-five bills were introduced . . . Eighteen hearings were held, six in Washington, D.C., and twelve in the field. Thousands of pages of transcript were compiled, and congressional mail ran as heavy as on any natural resource issue in modern times.”⁵³

The Senate passed the bill 78 to 8 in September 1961 with the leadership of western Senators Clinton P. Anderson (Democrat of New Mexico) and Frank Church (Democrat of Idaho). However, that bill was subsequently so distorted by wholesale amendment in the House committee chaired by

Congressman Wayne Aspinall that conservationists successfully rallied their allies to kill it when he tried to bring the unacceptable bill to a House vote in 1962 under a procedure barring any amendments.

The Senate passed the bill again early in the next Congress and, just before leaving for Dallas in November 1963, President Kennedy confirmed a compromise on the bill with Chairman Aspinall.⁵⁴ Ultimately, the bill passed the House in July 1964 by a vote of 373 to 1. It was a compromise—Aspinall voted for it—but the fundamental architecture as envisioned by Zahniser was intact.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act on September 3, 1964, forty years after the first, temporary establishment of the Gila Wilderness Area.

Howard Zahniser was not there to savor the success he had catalyzed into being. He died in his sleep on May 5, 1964, just days after testifying at the final congressional hearing on the bill. His widow, Alice, and Olaus Murie's widow, Mardy, stood at President Johnson's side as the Wilderness Act was signed into law. In his eulogy to Zahniser, Dave Brower noted:

It was political madness, some political scientists observed, to try to take on so many opponents at once. They simply didn't have the measure of Howard Zahniser's skill as a constant advocate

. . . what made the most difference was one man's conscience, his tireless search for a way to put a national wilderness policy into law, his talking and writing and persuading, his living so that this Act might be born. The hardest times were those when good friends tired because the battle was so long. Urging these friends back into action was the most anxious part of Howard Zahniser's work. It succeeded, but it took his last energy.⁵⁵

Zahniser's dream was to achieve a Wilderness Act that would stand the test of time, truly perpetuating, in the words of the law itself, "an enduring resource of wilderness" "for the permanent good of the whole people." He earnestly sought to build the broadest possible consensus around the bill, to give its future implementation the most auspicious start.

We fall into the habit of using militaristic metaphors to describe our wilderness "battles" and "fights." Zahniser, however, was a lobbyist of a fundamentally different kind, seeking to see the virtues in opponents' arguments, striving to find a way, if he could, to meet their objections. During the Echo Park campaign, his colleague Fred Packard, executive secretary of the National Parks Association, commended Zahniser on his "happy faculty of standing firmly by your guns, and yet being able to give those on the other side of the line credit for integrity and sincerity."⁵⁶ Zahniser did not see opponents as enemies; he genuinely coveted coming to some understanding whereby their interests and his for wilderness preservation could be reconciled. "We don't force—we persuade," he said, "we try to meet objections."⁵⁷

When, during those years, the leading roadblock to the Wilderness Bill, Chairman Aspinall, was felled by a heart attack, Zahniser wrote to him:

I shall not cease to hope that you and I can live and work together . . . to help achieve what I am sure both of us will be happy to see accomplished.⁵⁸

One might think this was just a toadying letter intended to play up to Aspinall, but not from Zahniser, who considered Aspinall a personal friend and sought to make him a friend of wilderness. In a private letter that same day, Zahniser wrote to Harvey Broome:

I do hope that [Aspinall] is all right and will remain on the scene, for I have faith that we are going to be able to work things out with him. If so, our consensus will be the broader and our prospects the better at the beginning of our ten-year review program.⁵⁹

THE OUTLOOK FOR WILDERNESS: 1964

So, how was the outlook for wilderness changed in 1964 by the Wilderness Act?

- *The Wilderness Act established a clear, unambiguous national policy to preserve wilderness*, recognizing wilderness itself as a resource of value.
- *The Wilderness Act established a specific definition of wilderness*, a practical standard ready to be applied to real areas.
- *The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System*—and designated the first 9,140,000 acres in *statutorily protected* wilderness areas.
- *The Wilderness Act set out a single, consistent wilderness management directive* to apply to wilderness areas in the jurisdiction of all federal land management agencies.
- *The Wilderness Act mandated a wilderness review process*, including local public hearings, for the agencies to review specified roadless lands, setting a ten-year timetable for wilderness recommendations to reach the Congress.
- *The Wilderness Act asserted the exclusive power of the Congress to designate wilderness areas*—and, importantly, also its exclusive power to decide on any un-designations or wilderness boundary changes, taking that power out of the hands of executive branch administrators.
- The Wilderness Act thus constituted the best, most practical mechanism to actually preserve wilderness *in perpetuity*.
- And, fundamentally, the Wilderness Act *shifted the wilderness movement from the defense to the offense*, with a real program and means to extend statutory wilderness protection to more acres of land.

But what did all of this actually mean, on the ground, in real wilderness protection? Consider this comparison:

The First Forty Years:

- From Aldo Leopold’s success in gaining temporary designation of the Gila Wilderness in 1924 until the passage of the Wilderness Act four decades later, wilderness advocates and the Forest Service were primarily fussing around with the same 14,000,000 acres, the old national forest primitive areas given halfway protection during the 1930s. No net acreage was added after 1939. Wilderness lands in other agency jurisdictions had no real protection at all.
- With the passage of the Wilderness Act, 9,140,000 of those acres became the “instant” wilderness areas, the first to receive statutory protection.

The Subsequent Four Decades:

- By comparison, it is just about forty years since the enactment of the Wilderness Act. Yet in this period our movement has secured statutory wilderness protection for an *additional* 96,600,000 acres. More than ten times as much.
- Today, our National Wilderness Preservation System comprises 105,691,266 acres. (*Data from www.wilderness.net*)

IMPLEMENTING THE WILDERNESS ACT

Once the Wilderness Act became law, the challenge for wilderness activists and federal agency personnel was to learn to use it. Things did not just change overnight. Advocates and the agencies had to get used to this new tool and learn to use it to best effect.

The Ten-Year Review

The terms of the Wilderness Act required the Forest Service to review the remaining 5,000,000 acres of old 1930s “primitive areas,” and the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service each to review all roadless lands in their jurisdiction for suitability to be designated as wilderness. Each draft agency recommendation and its proposed wilderness boundaries were the subject of a public hearing in the state, after which a refined agency recommendation worked its way up the Executive Branch hierarchy to the White House, leading to a formal wilderness recommendation to Congress by the President. The law required that all of these presidential recommendations be sent to Congress by September 1974.

In these provisions, the Wilderness Act set up the most advanced set of environmental study and public participation requirements in any law to that time. (The environmental impact review procedures of the National Environmental Policy Act did not come until five years later.)

As it turned out, the ten-year wilderness review process was an invaluable stimulus for the wilderness advocacy movement, for two reasons:

Correcting Misinterpretations of the Act. Thanks to the Wilderness Act, the often-flawed agency wilderness recommendations were not the final word, as had previously been the case. Higher officials in the departments and the White House could improve them, and often did when advocates laid out the case for the larger citizen boundaries. And the congressional review and amendment process created a kind of “court of appeals” in which wilderness advocates were able to work with their congressional allies to spotlight agency misinterpretations of the Wilderness Act.

This was a time of intense disputes over correct interpretation of the Wilderness Act. Agency misinterpretations included the Forest Service’s “purity doctrine” (which proposed to exclude as unqualified for protection millions of acres of wildlands the agency claimed were not wild enough) and the National Park Service’s “threshold zones” (which proposed to exclude vast swaths of wildland between the edge of park roads and developments and their proposed wilderness boundaries, leaving what conservation groups saw as beachheads for more increments of park development). As it considered each presidential wilderness recommendation, Congress—encouraged by wilderness advocates—corrected these agency efforts to constrain the reach of the Wilderness Act by misinterpretation. The Fish and Wildlife Service, which had supported the Wilderness Bill from the outset, largely avoided these kinds of problems of misinterpretation.

Great Change in Wilderness Movement. The Wilderness Act’s ten-year review process was so mammoth, so compressed in time, so intense, and so locally focused, with the required local public hearings coming up in such rapid succession, that it confronted the still-small wilderness movement with a profound challenge. The upshot was a great change that created the far-flung, highly decentralized movement of wilderness advocates and local advocacy organizations we have today.

Stewart Brandborg

Again, a gifted leader emerged to lead wilderness advocates in the enormous transition that was needed in the character of the movement itself, a transition that ushered in an era of unprecedented growth of support for wilderness. Stewart Brandborg, a Montanan and conservation staffer at the National Wildlife Federation, had joined The Wilderness Society’s governing council in 1956. In 1959 Brandborg joined the small staff of The Wilderness Society as Zahniser’s assistant executive director. After Zahniser’s death, he became executive director.

Because “Brandy” had worked side-by-side with Zahniser from the inception of the lobbying drive for the Wilderness Act, he was well aware of the biggest defeat conservationists felt they’d had to swallow to get the Act passed at all. This was the insistence by conservative western members of Congress, led by Chairman Aspinall, that each new wilderness area to be added to the system require affirmative congressional approval—a new act of Congress.

Zahniser's original bill, as it had twice passed the Senate, proposed a kind of automatic wilderness addition mechanism, in which the agencies would make their wilderness recommendations, with their preferences for specific boundaries, and those would become the new wilderness areas automatically—unless an agency proposal was overruled by a “veto” resolution passed by Congress. Wilderness Bill opponents felt this automatic process abused the prerogatives of the Congress to itself make the big decisions about the public lands.

Senator Henry M. Jackson (Dem.-WA) summarized the two sides of this debate:

The real fight is between conservationists' desire for a mechanism which will force Congress to act to keep an area out of the wilderness system, and the effort of the opponents to require Congressional action before an area gets in. The proponents want to prevent wilderness proposals from dying because Congress fails to get around to them. The opponents want to capitalize on delays and oversights to keep areas out. It is a struggle for tactical advantage.⁶⁰

“A Great Liberating Force”

By late 1963, Zahniser and his colleagues had bowed to Aspinall's insistence on the each-new-area-requires-an-act-of-Congress arrangement for additions to the wilderness system. Given a committee chairman's life-or-death power of legislation, this was part of the price Aspinall set for even allowing the bill to reach a House vote. To conservationists, who had twice defeated this concept in key votes in the Senate, this was initially seen as a major defeat.

Zahniser soon recognized the hidden potential benefit of the requirement for “affirmative action” by Congress on each new wilderness area. In a 1964 Seattle speech two weeks before his death, Zahniser told wilderness advocates:

It will be our undertaking—yours, especially, who live near these areas—to equip yourselves, to know these areas being reviewed, to prepare materials in cooperation with the land administrators, to appear at the hearings that will be held, to continue to support the establishment of this program.⁶¹

Reflecting on the early years of that effort, Brandborg reported to The Wilderness Society's governing council in 1968:

[Aspinall's] “blocking effort,” as we saw it at the time, has turned out to be a great liberating force in the conservation movement. By closing off the channel of accomplishing completion of the Wilderness System substantially on an executive level, where heads of [conservation] organizations would normally consult and advise [agency officials] on behalf of the members, the Wilderness Law, as it was passed, has opened the way for a far more effective conservation movement, in which people in local areas must be involved in a series of drives for preservation of the wilderness they know.⁶²

Grassroots Organizing and Citizen Wilderness Proposals

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the Sierra Club, led by Mike McCloskey, and The Wilderness Society, led by Brandborg and his new assistant executive director, Rupert Cutler, geared up to deal with scores of agency wilderness proposals in every part of the country. In order to pass legislation designating new wilderness areas, conservation leaders had to build the essential grassroots political support across the country. This effort contributed to the rapid nationwide expansion of the Sierra Club's chapter and group structure, and to the hiring of grassroots organizers and opening of regional offices by both organizations. This growing commitment to grassroots organizing resulted in a burst of growth in conservation activism well before the original Earth Day in 1970—an event that too many believe marked the beginning of the environmental movement.

This turn to intensive grassroots organizing and the encouragement of grassroots groups as the lead advocates for their own citizen wilderness proposals was the key to the much greater political impact of the wilderness movement—indeed, the entire environmental movement—in the later decades of the twentieth century.

The process involved locating conservation-minded local people, connecting them with each other, helping organize local wilderness committees, and focusing them on forthcoming agency wilderness studies in their area. It involved training sessions to give new grassroots tools to conduct their own field studies and develop their own citizen wilderness proposals as an alternative to the agency recommendations. In that period, gifted wilderness organizers—like Joe Walicki in Oregon, Jim Eaton in California, Bart Koehler in Wyoming, Dave Foreman in New Mexico, and Bill Cunningham in Montana—built the modern wilderness movement from the ground up. Clif Merritt coordinated these western wilderness organizers from The Wilderness Society’s western office in Denver, while Ernie Dickerman did similar work in the East.

The Sierra Club was organizing as well, led by its national wilderness committee, which produced training materials, conducted workshops, and provided advice to chapter activists working on local wilderness proposals. Sierra Club regional offices, staffed by wilderness advocates including John McComb in the Southwest and Brock Evans in the Northwest, developed new grassroots networks.

As the next step, The Wilderness Society invited grassroots leaders to Washington, D.C. for “Washington Wilderness Seminars,” weeklong intensive training sessions on how Congress works—and how to *work on* Congress. [It was during this formative period that I joined the staff of The Wilderness Society in Washington DC.]

If, after the public hearings, an agency persisted with an inadequate wilderness proposal—as they often did—we would bring local citizen leaders to Washington and go over the heads of the agency, setting up meetings with their bosses in the upper levels of the Interior or Agriculture department. We often got agency wilderness proposals improved and expanded in this way; but if not, we could also go over those bosses’ heads to sympathetic presidential aides in the White House. Through the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations, this often resulted in improving agency wilderness recommendations, even before they were formally sent to Congress.

The ultimate goal, of course, was to prevail in Congress. As agency wilderness recommendations moved toward Capitol Hill, we worked with grassroots leaders to generate effective grassroots support focused on their own elected representatives, so that often the bill introduced was for the more expansive citizen proposal, not the inadequate proposal of the agency. Beginning in 1968, hundreds of grassroots citizen leaders—not paid staff—traveled to Washington for training sessions, lobbying their own congressional delegations, and to testify for wilderness proposals they had helped shape.

This quantum leap in organizing and training grassroots volunteer activists was the “great liberating force” Brandborg had recognized and of which he was the foremost evangelist—a not-exaggerated word for the passion he devoted to developing a larger, more diverse, and better-trained grassroots wilderness movement across the country.

Congress Expands Agency Wilderness Proposals

Thanks to the Wilderness Act—and to Chairman Aspinall’s “victory” in requiring that each addition to the wilderness system be enacted by an act of Congress—the Congress became the “court of appeals” where citizen groups could challenge still-inadequate agency wilderness proposals. Senator Church, who had fought the Aspinall approach, acknowledged as much in 1972, telling one of Aspinall’s Senate allies:

I recall I was not persuaded at that time that this was the necessary way of handling new additions to the wilderness [system] but from what I have seen since, I think you were quite right.

I am glad the Act contains this provision because it enables us now to exercise an oversight that we otherwise might well have relinquished to executive discretion alone.⁶³

Thanks to Aspinall's requirement, as we worked on the earliest wilderness proposals in the late 1960s and 1970s, more often than not the Congress expanded wilderness areas beyond the boundaries proposed by the agencies.

The first area to move through Congress and be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System after the original Wilderness Act was the San Rafael Wilderness near Santa Barbara, California, one of the old L-20 "primitive areas" from the 1930s. Here is how Chairman Aspinall reacted to what happened:

This primitive area was 74,990 acres. I repeat: 74,990 acres. After the first hearing, this was raised to 110,403 acres. Then, after the final hearing, it was brought to Congress with 142,918 acres . . . [Rep. John Saylor] succeeded in getting 2,200 more acres [by amendment in Aspinall's committee], which makes a total of 145,118 acres, . . .

May I say to my colleagues, if this is going to be the trend in our determination of whether or not primitive areas are to become wilderness areas, and if we are going to increase them by 100 percent, then my opinion is that creation of new wilderness areas in the future are going to be very few and very far between.⁶⁴

The same approach of citizen proposals as an alternative to the agency recommendations was applied to proposed wilderness areas in the national wildlife refuges and the National Park System. Through the late 1960s and the 1970s, Congress enacted legislation, adding scores of new wilderness areas to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

IMPLEMENTING THE WILDERNESS ACT: NATIONAL FOREST DE FACTO WILDERNESS "ROADLESS AREAS"

The 5,000,000 acres of 1930s-era national forest primitive areas which the Wilderness Act required to be studied were certainly not the only wilderness-quality lands on the national forests. That there were many other undeveloped areas—what came to be called the *de facto wilderness* and, later, *roadless areas*—meriting preservation was well understood by Zahniser, who discussed the question in his 1962 testimony on the Wilderness Bill. The *de facto wilderness* was also on the minds of Brower, Brandborg, McCloskey, and their colleagues even in the final efforts to pass the Wilderness Act. But given the political terrain of the time, they could not hope to pass even the basic wilderness law if they reached too far in the lands they listed for mandatory wilderness study. As Congressman John Saylor, the leading House crusader for the act and for its implementation, said in a 1963 House speech:

There are other national forest areas that are in fact wilderness but have never been so classified for protection as such. Nothing in this bill would prevent the Secretary of Agriculture from considering such areas for preservation. Each area, however, will have to be the subject of further legislation in the future.⁶⁵

Once the Wilderness Act was in place, it was not surprising that wilderness advocates recognized it was a tool they could use to secure statutory protection for millions of acres of *de facto wilderness* not covered by the study mandate of the act. Dave Brower offered his favorite definition in a 1962 speech to a wilderness conference: "They are simply 'wilderness areas which have been set aside by God but which have not yet been created by the Forest Service.'" *De facto wilderness*, he added, is "the wilderness that sits in death row . . . and there has been nothing . . . like . . . a fair trial."⁶⁶

As Brandborg predicted in 1964, before the Wilderness Bill was enacted, "the main recourse of citizens who seek protection of these [*de facto*] areas lies in their appeals to members of Congress."⁶⁷ In the late 1960s, citizen groups in Montana, Alabama, Oregon, West Virginia, and other states began developing their own proposals for congressional designation of areas of *de facto* national forest wilderness. These citizen proposals were often spurred on by imminent Forest Service plans to road

and log the roadless lands in question, during a period when the “cut” of national forest timber was sharply escalating. Some of these areas were in states with well-developed wilderness support and with sympathetic congressional delegations, so soon bills were introduced in Congress—citizen proposals to go around the Forest Service and designate these citizen-proposed areas as wilderness.

The Lincoln-Scapegoat Wilderness

The first of these citizen-initiated de facto wilderness bills was the Lincoln-Scapegoat Wilderness proposal in Montana. Montana had a well-developed wilderness movement led by the Montana Wildlife Federation, the Montana Wilderness Association, and organizations of outfitters. And Montana then had a sympathetic congressional delegation, including Senator Lee Metcalf (Democrat), an original sponsor of the Wilderness Act, and Senator Mike Mansfield (Democrat), the powerful Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate.

Local citizens devised a highly credible Lincoln-Scapegoat Wilderness proposal, under the leadership of a hardware dealer named Cecil Garland, working with The Wilderness Society’s Clif Merritt. Because they did their fieldwork and their homework, building a solid base of grassroots support, their proposal had strong political credibility with their congressional delegation and was introduced as legislation in 1965. Over the dogged opposition of the Forest Service, the citizen proposal was enacted in 1972 as the Scapegoat Wilderness, a major expansion of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Congressional approval of a large addition to the Eagle Cap Wilderness in Oregon followed two months later.

Many in the Forest Service had a tough time adjusting to these new political realities of wilderness designation. In frustration, the regional forester in Montana asked rhetorically:

Why should a sporting goods and hardware dealer in Lincoln, Montana, designate the boundaries for the 240,000-acre Lincoln Back County addition to the Bob Marshall [Wilderness Area]? If lines are to be drawn, we should be drawing them.⁶⁸

But that, of course, was just the point of the Wilderness Act. The decision-making and boundary drawing were taken over by higher authority, the Congress of the United States. And conservation groups realized they could go over the heads of the Forest Service with their own proposals to Congress, both as an alternative to the agency’s inadequate proposals for the old primitive areas, and for de facto wilderness, the roadless lands not included in the Wilderness Act study process.

NEPA, Roadless Areas, and “rare”

As all of this was unfolding, Congress enacted the National Environmental Policy Act—NEPA—in January 1970. The court-enforceable procedural requirements of NEPA added impetus to Forest Service efforts to get ahead of and regain “control” over the burgeoning de facto wilderness issue. In 1971, the agency initiated the “Roadless Area Review and Evaluation” (RARE, now referred to as RARE-I)—a process to inventory all roadless areas and select some for more intensive wilderness study. Though the agency choose to apply its erroneous “purity doctrine” and thus ignore virtually all roadless areas in the East, South and Midwest, they inventoried 55,900,000 acres of roadless areas, 12,300,000 acres of which they selected as areas for further wilderness study. Not surprisingly, however, conservationists’ greatest concern was with the far larger area the Forest Service did not select but hoped to be able to develop—if it could be freed from the specter of wilderness designation.

The outcome of a 1972 Sierra Club lawsuit, applying the new National Environmental Policy Act to this decision, led the Forest Service to agree to evaluate the wilderness potential of *each* roadless area in an environmental impact statement (EIS) before development could proceed. Both the RARE-I process and subsequent efforts by the agency to use its rudimentary national forest planning processes to meet the EIS requirement of the court decision were deeply flawed, spurring even greater citizen dissatisfaction and fueling new demands for Congress to step in.⁶⁹

The Endangered American Wilderness Act and “RARE-II”

Citizen complaints about the treatment of roadless areas culminated in the highly successful campaign to enact the Endangered American Wilderness Act. Launched amid the presidential campaign of 1976 and sponsored by two Democratic presidential hopefuls, Senator Frank Church and Representative Morris K. Udall (Democrat of Arizona), this legislation gathered together several dozen long-standing citizen-initiated de facto-wilderness proposals. Endorsed by candidate Jimmy Carter during the campaign, it became part of his legislative program when he became President.

As we had planned, hearings on this legislation provided a forum for airing citizen protests about the weaknesses of the RARE-I process and the flawed Forest Service efforts to adequately evaluate wilderness during the land-use planning. In approving the bill, the House Interior Committee used its formal committee report to lay out “its guidance as to how the Wilderness Act should now be interpreted,” directing the Forest Service to correct its stubbornly held “purity” misinterpretations.⁷⁰

The hearings also led President Carter’s assistant secretary of agriculture, Rupert Cutler (former assistant to Stewart Brandborg at The Wilderness Society) to announce a new Forest Service effort, called RARE-II, to better inventory and study national forest de facto wilderness.⁷¹

The RARE-II inventory was a vast improvement over RARE-I. With the purity doctrine overturned by Congress, this time the agency included roadless areas on national forests in the eastern half of the country. Some 2,900 roadless areas were identified and mapped, totaling 62,100,000 acres. However, there were still systemic problems in how the Forest Service chose to evaluate the roadless areas, and citizen groups strongly disputed the agency’s 1979 decisions on which roadless areas it recommended as wilderness and which it proposed to open for future development.

RARE-II had the effect of opening the floodgates for congressional action on millions of acres of de facto wilderness. Again, the focus of debate was not those areas Assistant Secretary Cutler and the Forest Service recommended for wilderness, but on the 47,000,000 acres left in “nonwilderness” and “further planning” categories. And, again, court decisions in a lawsuit—this time by the State of California—settled the matter: a site-specific environmental impact statement would be required before *any* of the inventoried national forest roadless areas could be developed.

Release Language and the Post-Rare-II Wilderness Laws

The new court order resulting from the State of California’s RARE-II lawsuit in turn generated great pressure from logging and other development interests for Congress to find some way to get national forest roadless areas “released” from the requirement for intensive area-by-area review of wilderness.

Ultimately, the logging industry and other wilderness opponents gave their support to bills to designate some of roadless areas as wilderness, their goal being to get as much of the roadless land as they could “released” from further consideration as potential wilderness and thus made available for roading and timber sales. We and our congressional champions—notably Representatives Teno Roncalio (Democrat of Wyoming), Phillip Burton (Democrat of California), John F. Seiberling (Democrat of Ohio), and James Weaver (Democrat of Oregon)—used this industry pressure as powerful leverage to insist on substantial amounts of wilderness designation in such bills, a process adroitly masterminded by the Sierra Club’s ace wilderness lobbyist of that period, Tim Mahoney.

In short order Congress passed dozens of state-by-state national forest wilderness bills, but with “release language” freeing other areas for possible development. Congress designated more than 8,000,000 acres of national forest roadless areas as wilderness in 1984 alone, in eighteen statewide laws, most substantially larger than the Forest Service’s RARE-II wilderness recommendations. The release language to sidestep the site-specific EIS requirement and thus open large portions of the RARE-II roadless lands was a key driver in the new momentum for national forest wilderness bills. This is reflected in the unlikely list of states for which these statewide bills were enacted, including Texas and Utah, not states with congressional delegations known for their support of wilderness. However, the release language in these 1980s-era laws released roadless lands not designated as wilderness only for the duration of one cycle of national forest management planning. A new look at

all potential wilderness lands is required when forest plans are revised (a process being implemented in the 2000s, and resulting in new Forest Service wilderness recommendations).

Losses of National Forest Roadless Areas and 'Big Wilderness'

It must be noted that all through the history being recounted here, there were major losses of de facto wilderness lands as well. Foremost was the steady loss of national forest roadless lands under the relentless pressure of an unsustainable tide of road building and logging that hugely accelerated after the Second World War. The pace of logging accelerated again in the 1970s; large roadless areas were dismembered into smaller fragments and deep-forested valleys were roaded to their very upper reaches, in many cases just to preclude later wilderness designation. The loss of "big wilderness" is masked in the acreage totals for roadless land, as this process of roading and logging fragmented large roadless units while still leaving much of the land roadless but in many smaller units. Aldo Leopold had called it "the process of splitting . . ." ⁷²

While these losses are tragic, the historical reality was that the movement to protect wilderness and to obtain official wilderness protection policies had emerged, often in a painfully slow process, just as the last large areas of roadless lands were falling to the bulldozers and the chainsaws. The two trends emerged simultaneously. As Leopold warned in 1925:

An incredible number of complications and obstacles . . . arise from the fact that the wilderness idea was born after, rather than before, the normal course of commercial development had begun. The existence of these complications is nobody's fault. But it will be everybody's fault if they do not serve as a warning against delaying immediate inauguration of a comprehensive system of wilderness areas. ⁷³

Nonetheless, important progress was being made. Just the fact that the Forest Service undertook the RARE-I and RARE-II inventories forced local agency officials to systematically identify roadless lands for the first time. These inventories, flawed though they were, gave grassroots conservationists new tools for their work, alerting them to areas that had not yet been subject to citizen study. Citizens conducted their own ground-truthing fieldwork, resulting in their own larger inventories of roadless lands, which they shared with Congress. With the power of the National Environmental Policy Act, the decision to open these roadless areas for development became something local people knew about and could effectively challenge in the courts and in Congress.

Implementing the Wilderness Act: "Wild Areas East"?

When the Wilderness Act passed, it immediately incorporated four areas in the eastern half of the United States in the wilderness system. Three of these were areas the Forest Service *itself* had administratively designated prior to 1964 as "wild areas" through the 1939 U regulations. (The fourth, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Minnesota had its own unique history.) The three Eastern wild areas—two in North Carolina, one in New Hampshire—were not pristine lands, but nature was healing the wounds of earlier railroad and horse logging. Indeed, the Forest Service's 1963 press release announcing the Chief's administrative designation of the Shining Rock Wild Area in North Carolina pointed out that to achieve a desirable ridge top boundary configuration, a *current* clearcut logging area within the new wild area would be completed, the logging areas rehabilitated, and the roads obliterated.

As the Wilderness Act began to be implemented, Congress took the same approach, incorporating areas that had a history of earlier logging and roads within new wilderness areas on lands administered by the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. That Congress intended such formerly abused lands to be within the Wilderness Act's pragmatic designation criteria was clear from the areas the Act mandated for study under the ten-year wilderness review, which included areas such as Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks, and the Seney and Moosehorn national wildlife refuges, each of which had a history of land abuse.

The Forest Service chose to ignore all this established congressional precedent and direction about wilderness in the East. By the early 1970s the agency was feeling seriously threatened by growing

grassroots pressures for Congress to protect de facto wilderness on the national forests. Agency leaders talked themselves into the conclusion that no areas in the eastern half of the country could even qualify for consideration as wilderness under the Wilderness Act. In no small part they were motivated by the desire to sustain their newly-minted *purity* interpretation—we said “misinterpretation”—of the Wilderness Act’s designation criteria in the East, in order to apply it as a means of minimizing the expanse of wilderness boundaries in *western* national forests, where lower-elevation areas, valleys, and plateaus also often had a history of some past development.⁷⁴ The ensuing “eastern wilderness fight” was, in fact, about how much land would ultimately be determined to be qualified, in the West as well as the East.

As the vehicle for this purity idea, the Forest Service quietly drafted new legislation to create a separate and competing system of “Wild Areas East.” Among other things, their plan would allow cutting trees to “improve” wildlife habitat and recreation. And it would have Congress, by implication, endorse their purity criteria for application of the Wilderness Act in the West.

Associate Chief John McGuire announced this “wild areas east” idea at a Club wilderness conference in Washington, D.C. Despite immediate opposition from The Wilderness Society and Friends of the Earth, the Forest Service continued to promote the concept, leading to introduction of a wild areas east bill in Congress at their behest. That bill passed the Senate in 1972 (having been brought to the Senate floor with no prior notice and no debate) and there was, for a time, a split on this issue among conservationists. Led by The Wilderness Society, wilderness advocates responded with our own bill, the proposed Eastern Wilderness Areas Act. This bill packaged together numerous citizen proposals for de facto wilderness areas on national forests in the East and was our vehicle for countering the Forest Service initiative.

To wilderness advocates and their congressional allies, there were two fundamental issues at stake in the showdown between the Forest Service’s wild areas east legislation and the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act:

Confirming “Purity.” We knew that if the Forest Service succeeded in getting Congress to adopt their nothing-in-the-East-qualifies-as-wilderness misinterpretation, it would be a huge boost to their purity doctrine. As Senator Church, one of the architects of the Wilderness Act, told the chief of the Forest Service:

If we [adopt the Forest Service theory] we will be saying, in effect, that you can’t include a comparable area in the West in the wilderness system. That is the precise effect of your approach, because you will have redefined section 2C [of the Wilderness Act].⁷⁵

The implication would have been to bifurcate Zahniser’s unified *National* Wilderness Preservation System. And such legislation would have confirmed the Forest Service in its idea of “pure” wilderness designation criteria—with profoundly adverse implications for the work of wilderness advocates in the West. The agency was using the same purity dogma to hem-in proposed boundaries as it made its recommendations for the old primitive areas, all of which were in the West.

Confusing Congressional Committee Jurisdiction. By Forest Service design, the wild areas east legislation found its way to the congressional agriculture committees, not the interior committees which had jurisdiction over the Wilderness Act. The House and Senate “Ag” committees were not friendly territory to wilderness lobbyists but familiar precincts to the Forest Service and Department of Agriculture lobbyists. (Indeed, it was an unsuccessful effort to send the Wilderness Bill to this hostile committee that opponents used as their major attack against the bill in 1961, when it first passed the Senate.)

The Eastern Wilderness Areas Act

After prolonged controversy, both on Capitol Hill and within their own ranks, conservationists united and, led by Ernie Dickerman of The Wilderness Society, defeated the wild areas east legislation, passing instead their own bill. The Eastern Wilderness Areas Act designated fifteen new wilderness

areas in eastern national forests pursuant to the 1964 Wilderness Act, and required wilderness studies for seventeen other roadless areas.⁷⁶

As Forest Service historian Dennis Roth recounts, this eastern wilderness bill “was signed by President Ford on January 3, 1975. It has erroneously been called the ‘Eastern Wilderness Act;’ however, it has no title.” In fact, conservationists call it by its correct name: the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act.⁷⁷

That the designation of such formerly abused lands as wilderness was entirely in keeping with the founding philosophy of the wilderness movement is exemplified by Forest Service wilderness pioneer Aldo Leopold, who wrote in *A Sand County Almanac*: “in any practical [wilderness] program the unit areas to be preserved must vary greatly in size and in degree of wildness.”⁷⁸

IMPLEMENTING THE WILDERNESS ACT: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

In a 1926 article in the *National Parks Bulletin*, Robert Sterling Yard noted, “There are other wildernesses than those in the National Parks and Forests. In the Public Lands, which still have greater area than the National Forests, will be found wilderness regions of charm and beauty.”⁷⁹ Bob Marshall advocated wilderness protection on these public domain lands in the 1930s.

From the earliest thinking about the Wilderness Bill, it was part of Zahniser’s ambition to include the wilderness-quality lands among the western public domain administered by the Bureau of Land Management. In his early drafts of the Wilderness Bill, Zahniser included “other public lands” in listing federal lands potentially to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. However, the BLM had no established wilderness program and had not administratively designated any areas, making it impossible, in the political context of the 1950s and early 1960s, to require a formal wilderness review for BLM-administered lands as part of the Wilderness Bill. Therefore, as introduced in 1956, the first Wilderness Bill simply asserted that the Wilderness System would include:

. . . such units as Congress may designate by statute and such units as may be designated within any federally owned or controlled land and/or water by the official or officials authorized to determine the use of the lands and waters involved.⁸⁰

Even this broad and non-mandatory allowance of wilderness designation on BLM administered lands was dropped as the Wilderness Bill was refined and enacted (though it remained implied). In his 1962 House testimony on the Wilderness Bill, Howard Zahniser said only: “Perhaps the Bureau of Land Management may later find that some of the public domain under its jurisdiction is best suited for wilderness preservation.”⁸¹

Sixteen days after he signed the Wilderness Act, President Johnson signed a temporary public land management law governing BLM-administered lands generally. That bill gave the agency explicit authority to administratively set aside lands with wilderness values. This only made it more obviously illogical that millions of acres of roadless areas administered by the BLM had been excluded from the Wilderness Act’s ten-year wilderness review process and possible statutory protection. Wilderness advocates were just waiting for the right political circumstances to arise in order to correct this gap in the architecture of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act

The opportunity to bring BLM-administered lands under the Wilderness Act mandate arose when commercial interests and their friends in Congress sought sweeping “organic” legislation to modernize the legal regime governing the long-neglected general public domain lands. Ironically, this drive had its impetus with Chairman Aspinall, who pressed for enactment of legislation establishing the Public Land Law Review Commission (PLLRC). Aspinall himself chaired this presidential commission, which, in 1970, recommended that wilderness areas on these lands become part of the Wilderness Act program. Aspinall insisted that wilderness advocates support the legislation authorizing PLLRC as part of his price for ultimately agreeing to the Wilderness Bill.

The PLLRC recommended new organic legislation for the BLM. During congressional consideration of this proposal, conservationists led by Harry Crandell of The Wilderness Society, and Sierra Club wilderness lobbyists Chuck Clusen and John McComb, succeeded in inserting a wilderness study requirement. Perhaps because it so obviously corrected a glaring gap in the logic of the Wilderness Act, the wilderness provision was noncontroversial. When the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) was enacted in 1976, it required the BLM to inventory all roadless areas within its jurisdiction and selected "Wilderness Study Areas" which would be protected in their natural state until Congress made permanent decisions about adding them to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

As a result of their initial inventory of roadless areas—an inventory fraught with errors and oversights that excluded more than half of the lands conservationists felt should have been included—the BLM classified some 27,500,000 acres as wilderness study areas. Congress has since designated some of these areas, but the progress is slow, for much of this BLM roadless land is in states with relatively hostile congressional delegations and governors, notably Utah. Spirited grassroots groups and coalitions are at work in every state with BLM-administered lands, educating and organizing to build grassroots support for more BLM-administered wilderness.

As one of the fruits of this work, in 1994 Congress capped a decades-long citizen campaign by enacting the largest single bill packaging wilderness designations in the Lower 48, the California Desert Protection Act. This one law established sixty-nine BLM-administered wilderness areas totaling some 3,570,000 acres and another 326,000 acres in eight wilderness study areas, as well as expanding Death Valley and Joshua Tree national monuments, redesignating them as national parks, and designating large wilderness areas within them.⁸²

During the George W. Bush administration, political appointees in the Interior Department have shown great hostility to wilderness designation, reversing long-established policies to cut off further consideration of recommending any BLM areas to Congress for statutory wilderness protection beyond the remaining portion of the original 27,500,000 acres of wilderness study areas.

IMPLEMENTING THE WILDERNESS ACT: ALASKA

For decades pioneer conservationists in Alaska sought stronger protection for the unsurpassed wilderness of "The Great Land."

Prior to enactment of the Wilderness Act, the Forest Service had designated no primitive areas or wilderness areas administratively in the two national forests in southeast Alaska. Therefore, no areas in Alaska came into the National Wilderness Preservation System as part of the original areas designated by the Act itself in 1964. However, wilderness reviews were initiated for the many large roadless areas in the then-existing national parks and national wildlife refuges in Alaska, as required by the Wilderness Act study provisions.

Not daunted by the lack of foresight by Forest Service officials, citizen groups in Southeast Alaska prepared their own wilderness proposals, but a hostile congressional delegation made designation of these areas by Congress seem a distant dream. Most of the attention of conservation groups had to be given to the constant fight to turn back massive timber sales on the Tongass National Forest.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

Land use decisions across the vast expanse of federal lands in Alaska were bound up with the aboriginal land claims of Alaskan Natives, and with the massive development pressures resulting from the 1968 oil discovery at Prudhoe Bay and plans for the Trans Alaska pipeline.

When the Alaska Natives filed protests asserting their aboriginal land claims, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall imposed a land freeze in 1966, stopping all further transfers of federal lands (including those to meet the highly generous statehood grant of 104,000,000 federal acres to be selected by the

State of Alaska). To get the oil flowing and additional state land selections transferred, the Udall land freeze had to be lifted, and that could only occur when Congress resolved the Native land claims issue.

The upshot was great pressure from the state, the oil industry, the Nixon administration, and developers of all stripes to pass an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to implement a settlement that had been negotiated with Native organizations.⁸³

A few conservationists in Alaska and Lower 48 leaders, notably Dr. Edgar Wayburn of the Sierra Club and Harry Crandell of The Wilderness Society, realized that when the Native claims were settled and the land freeze removed, the slicing up of Alaska lands—the 375,000,000 acres of Alaska almost entirely owned by the American people—would surpass the frenzy of the nineteenth-century Oklahoma land rush. Where or when, in the rush to transfer millions of acres of lands out of the federal estate, would anyone speak up for the national interest in reserving some great expanses in Alaska as national parks, national wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers, and as wilderness?

The Alaska Coalition and “D-2”

Alaska conservation groups, The Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club formed the core of a new “Alaska Coalition” in 1970. In a come-from-behind effort, we urged Congress to include in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act a provision to require segregating some large expanses of federal land to be held in federal ownership pending more detailed study as potential parks, refuges, and wilderness areas.

The Alaska Coalition pushed this amendment to a vote on the House floor in 1970, where our “Udall-Saylor National Interest Lands Amendment” lost by a vote of 178 to 217. Though defeated, the impressive size of the favorable vote helped create political momentum for the “national interest lands” idea. As a result, building on a similar idea in the Senate bill, a national interest lands provision was incorporated in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

This “D-2” provision—so-called because it was section 17(d)(2) of the law—required that the Secretary of the Interior was to identify up to 80,000,000 acres of federal lands in Alaska having highest values for park, refuge, and wilderness purposes, and these would to be given interim protection until Congress could act on the results of more detailed studies. That interim protection would last until December 1978.

During the mid-1970s, the federal agencies undertook extensive land-use and wildlife studies across Alaska to fulfill the D-2 mandate. In parallel with those efforts, Alaska and national conservation leaders mounted an enormous effort to develop their own comprehensive and detailed set of citizen proposals for parks, refuges, wild rivers, and wilderness areas, designed on a scale to match Alaska’s vast and incomparable wilderness resources. The question was how to get this unprecedented set of proposals enacted into law—and before the interim protection ran out in December 1978.

Conservation leaders realized such a visionary program would draw powerful opposition from Alaska boosters, the Alaska congressional delegation, and every conceivable development interest, from oil to mining. To get their package through Congress would require a far larger, more cohesive effort than anything America’s conservation movement had ever mounted. Led by Chuck Clusen as its chairman, the Alaska Coalition reemerged, with Alaskan and national conservation groups agreeing to merge their efforts in order to focus unprecedented resources on a national campaign to preserve what we term “Alaska national interest lands.”

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

In 1977, with the citizen-developed Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) introduced in Congress, an extraordinary constellation of leaders came together behind it:

- *Jimmy Carter* became President, with Cecil Andrus as his Secretary of the Interior. Both were strong supporters of the vision of a truly historic Alaska Lands bill.

- *Rep. Morris K. Udall*, sponsor of the original “national interest lands” amendment back in 1970, became chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.
- *Rep. John Seiberling* became chairman of Udall’s special Alaska Lands Subcommittee and was an essential leader, the detail man with a unique depth of knowledge about Alaska lands teamed with Udall’s unmatched legislative skills.

The campaign to pass ANILCA—the largest, most cohesive campaign in the history of the environmental movement—raged through the late 1970s.⁸⁴ We triumphed in passing a very strong bill in the House of Representatives in 1978 by a 9 to 1 vote margin. When a Senate filibuster blocked this bill, and with the interim protection of the D-2 lands set to expire in December 1978, President Carter and Secretary Andrus took executive action, issuing executive orders to protect them indefinitely (most were presidential orders which could only be altered by Congress, not by a future President). This spurred even the bill’s staunchest opponents to want Congress to act, if only to be able to fine-tune the protections and boundaries of the presidential and secretarial orders.

In 1979 the House again passed a very strong bill, but the Senate committee approved a much-weakened, far smaller version. When Carter and our coalition won the first of a projected series of Senate floor votes on amendments to strengthen and expand the inadequate committee bill, Senate leaders pulled the bill from further floor action. Instead, they convened behind-closed-door negotiations dominated by those opposing the House-passed Udall bill.

The Senate bill that resulted from these one-sided negotiations was still unsatisfactory to conservationists. We worked with Congressmen Udall and Seiberling to prepare a much stronger substitute version we hoped to have the House adopt when it received the Senate-passed bill, setting up a House-Senate conference to resolve the differences. However, the 1980 election intervened and Ronald Reagan defeated President Carter. It was obvious that President Reagan would side with opponents of the Alaska lands bill. So, House leaders and conservationists had no real choice but to accept the weaker—but still historic—Senate version.

President Jimmy Carter signed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in an East Room ceremony on December 2, 1980. The act designated some 55,000,000 acres of wilderness, more than doubling the size of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Vast new wilderness areas were designated in existing and new national parks (32,355,000 acres in eight park units) and existing and new national wildlife refuges (18,560,000 acres in thirteen refuges). In a particularly hard-fought victory, long-delayed wilderness protection was provided at last for national forest land in Southeast Alaska (5,362,000 acres in fourteen wilderness areas).

On its tenth anniversary, the late T. H. Watkins wrote that the 1980 Alaska Lands Act:

. . . was at once one of the noblest and most comprehensive legislative acts in American history, because, with the scratch of the presidential pen that signed it, the act set aside more wild country than had been preserved anywhere in the world up to that time—104.3 million acres. By itself, the Alaska Lands Act stood as a ringing validation of the best of what the conservation movement had stood for in the century since Henry David Thoreau had walked so thoughtfully in the woods of Walden Pond.⁸⁵

ASSESSING THE WILDERNESS ACT AS IT NEARS ITS FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

The Wilderness Act was the culmination of a long and difficult genesis; implementing it is a continuing challenge. Dave Brower said passing the Act “took time because the meaning of wilderness had not yet achieved the public understanding it now has—in large part because of the battle for the Wilderness Act.”⁸⁶ Today, the words of Harvey Broome in his eulogy to Olaus Murie and Howard Zahniser have come true; wilderness has indeed become “an imperative in American life.”

- Today, the National Wilderness Preservation System embraces nearly 106,000,000 acres on more than 600 areas of federal land in 44 states.
- Today, there is a vibrant, ambitious, effective and highly decentralized wilderness movement in every part of our nation. It comprises not only the wilderness-oriented national organizations—notably The Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club and its chapters, the Campaign for America’s Wilderness, the National Audubon Society and its chapters, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the National Parks Conservation Association—but also hundreds upon hundreds of independent local organizations and wilderness advocacy coalitions in virtually every state. Some of these state wilderness groups, including those working for wilderness in Utah, Alaska, and Nevada now have their own full-time Washington, D.C., lobbyists.
- And today there are thousands of dedicated employees in the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management devoting their careers as stewards protecting America’s wilderness heritage.

THE ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE

A particular achievement for wildlands was the January 2001 approval of President Bill Clinton’s Roadless Area Conservation Rule for the national forests. This was not a last-minute action hastily adopted in the final weeks of the Clinton administration. It was built on the RARE-II inventory of roadless areas and on the basis of an elaborate two-year rule-making process, with more than 600 public meetings, the testimony of 16,000 witnesses, and more than a million written comments—overwhelmingly favoring the strongest possible, most inclusive protection for all remaining national forest roadless areas. It saw the largest outpouring of public comment in any federal rule-making in history, overwhelming in support of the strongest possible protection. The Rule is under strenuous counterattack by industry and conservative western state governors, including in a number of lawsuits. The Bush/Cheney administration, which sides with those interests, has worked to undermine this Rule, going so far as to oppose citizen group’s efforts to appeal an adverse court ruling in Wyoming which the administration itself chose not to appeal. In a different case, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Rule in a strongly worded reversal of a lower court ruling from Idaho.

Whatever its ultimate legal fate, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule has brought the fate of national forest roadless areas to a level of national prominence undreamed of in the days of RARE-I and RARE-II, let alone the days of Leopold, Marshall, Brower, or Zahniser.

Conservationists are vigorously defending the Roadless Rule, in court with the leadership of Earthjustice and in Congress with the leadership of the Heritage Forest Campaign, whose extraordinary work to secure the Rule was led by Oregon wilderness champion Ken Rait, who is now campaigns director for the Campaign for America’s Wilderness.

THE WILDERNESS MOVEMENT

Perhaps the most important achievement of the contemporary wilderness movement is a heightened focus on the still-unprotected wildlands on national forests and on BLM-administered lands. Across the country, local citizens continue to refine their own inventories of roadless lands, highlighting gaps in the agency inventories.

The wilderness movement continues to press for systematic protection of roadless federal lands and for congressional action to extend the hard-won legal protections of the Wilderness Act to more of these lands. Congress continues to enact wilderness designation laws. President George W. Bush signed four such laws in 2002, protecting an additional 530,000 acres of wilderness.

The work for BLM wilderness in politically challenging states such as Utah and Alaska, where millions of acres of superb wildlands are at stake, is of particular priority. While the wilderness of the national forests has a 75-year history, the history of wilderness protection on BLM lands mostly remains to be written by a new generation of wilderness advocates.

On an educational front, conservationists are working to build wider public support for wilderness protection and to deepen the base of wilderness activists and the diversity of our coalitions. Important themes of comprehensive ecosystem protection and science-based networks of wildlands are gaining ever-greater attention, notably through the work of The Wildlands Project and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

Both citizen groups and the four federal land management agencies are devoting more attention to the vital matter of appropriate wilderness management—we prefer the phrase *wilderness stewardship*. In the forefront of this work is a unique collaborative effort by the four wilderness agencies, the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, based in Missoula, Montana. In debates over increasingly complex wilderness stewardship issues, the wilderness movement stresses that the intent of the Wilderness Act—our heritage from Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, Howard Zahniser, and the other builders of our national wilderness preservation policy—is the only proper guide.

THE WILDERNESS ACT: A LAW FOR ALL SEASONS

The Wilderness Act is best perceived not as a piece of parchment in a musty archive but as a living tool. As with any tool, one must learn to use it effectively and one must keep it sharp.

The act does *not* empower citizens to preserve wilderness. It gives them a tool with which they *may* empower themselves—if they learn to use it effectively. It demands of those who seek to preserve more wilderness areas the discipline for steady and sustained grassroots work to organize and educate, for there is no shortcut of clever Capitol Hill strategy or clever legislative packaging that can substitute for strong, effective, and sustained local political support. The political process of wilderness preservation and congressional wilderness strategy cannot be reduced to a cookbook, but is a complex, fascinating lifetime study for thousands of wilderness advocates.

Each addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System requires that Congress pass, and that the President sign, a new law. Passing laws is *very* difficult—by design. The writers of our Constitution meant the bicameral legislature and the gauntlet of congressional procedures to be a guard against hasty legislation, and to produce a body of laws that would not be susceptible to willy-nilly change with the ebbs and flows of American politics.

That passing a law is difficult is borne out by the eight-year legislative odyssey of the Wilderness Act. Rather than being frustrated that it took eight years, Howard Zahniser praised the very character of the legislative process that made it so difficult. As he said in 1961:

Enactment of legislation by the Congress of the United States to establish an enduring wilderness preservation policy and program is as great an undertaking in its difficulties of realization as it is in its promise for the future of wilderness.

Yet if we are to anticipate a wilderness-forever future through a national sanction we must . . . take this difficult first step.

It is a step that is so difficult not because it goes so far but because it must be taken by so many. A whole nation steps forward, with purpose, in the enactment of such legislation, and it marches only when so many are ready to go that the others must move too. Nor in our great government do we disregard the reluctant ones. Rather, we persuade, we confer, we try to understand, we cooperate

If we are to gain the understanding and support of legislators—or the Congress—we must have the understanding and support of the people.⁸⁷

That is the lesson generations of wilderness advocates have learned as they have used the tool of the Wilderness Act. Behind each of the present wilderness areas in our 106,000,000-acre National Wilderness Preservation System is a story of local people, mostly volunteers, who have mastered this

process, built local public support, and thus seen enacted the more than 115 post-1964 wilderness laws by which we have built the wilderness system.

By design, the Wilderness Act is a law for all seasons. Because passing a law is so hard, passing a law to *remove* a wilderness area, or to shave away its boundaries, or to declassify an area is a daunting challenge to the opponents of wilderness. That, compared to the history of stroke-of-a-pen boundary alterations prior the Wilderness Act, is the essential protective power of the statutory wilderness designation for which Zahniser and his generation of wilderness activists campaigned so hard.

In the final analysis a law is, of course, simply a piece of paper. But that paper represents a national social consensus—Zahniser called it “a great concurrence.”

In his address to the Sierra Club wilderness conference in 1961, Zahniser said:

Working to preserve in perpetuity is a great inspiration.

We are not fighting a rear-guard action, we are facing a frontier.

We are not slowing down a force that inevitably will destroy all the wilderness there is. We are generating another force, never to be wholly spent, that, renewed generation after generation, will be always effective in preserving wilderness.

We are not fighting progress. We are making it.

We are not dealing with a vanishing wilderness.

We are working for a wilderness forever.⁸⁸

This history was originally published in June 2001. This November 2003 revised version was made possible by the National Park Service as part of its admirable work to familiarize its staff with the important role that wilderness protection plays in the perpetuation of the very values for which the national parks, national monuments, and other units of the National Park System were established.

—Doug Scott

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Howard Zahniser, testimony in *Wilderness Preservation System*, Hearings before the House Subcommittee on Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs (88th Congress, 2d Session) on H.R. 9070, H.R. 9162, S. 4, and Related Bills, April 27–30, 1 May 1964: 1205. This was a favorite Zahniser epigram, which he used often in various forms.
- ² Aldo Leopold, “The Last Stand of the Wilderness,” *American Forests and Forest Life* 31, no. 382 (October 1925): 602.
- ³ “The Wilderness Society Platform,” *The Living Wilderness* 1, no. 1 (September 1935): 2, reprinting a statement drafted that January.
- ⁴ Aldo Leopold, “Why the Wilderness Society?,” *The Living Wilderness* 1, no. 1: 6.
- ⁵ Robert Marshall, “The Universe of the Wilderness Is Vanishing,” *Nature Magazine* 9, no. 4 (April 1937): 236.
- ⁶ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949): 167. *Necromancy* is defined as a method of divination; black art; magic in general, especially sorcery, witchcraft, conjuration. That this “groping for solutions” was common in conservation policymaking generally in the 1920s is noted by Donald C. Swain, “Federal Conservation Policy, 1921–1933,” *University of California Publications in History* 76 (1963): 6.
- ⁷ The central role of the railroads from the earliest conception of the national park idea for Yellowstone is covered by Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
- ⁸ Aldo Leopold, “The Wilderness and its Place in Forest Recreational Policy,” *Journal of Forestry* 19, no. 7 (November 1921): 720.
- ⁹ Robert Marshall to Harold L. Ickes, May 21, 1937, Wilderness Society files and author’s files.
- ¹⁰ Leopold, “The Wilderness and its Place”: 718.
- ¹¹ U.S. Forest Service, “Report of the Forester,” (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1926): 36; and the same report for 1927: 13, as cited in Dennis M. Roth, *The Wilderness Movement and the National Forests* (College Station, TX: Intaglio Press, 1988): 3.
- ¹² Regulation L-20, October 30, 1929, as quoted in Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*: 3.
- ¹³ Mimeographed supplement to the Forest Service Administrative Manual sent to Forest Service Districts, June 29, 1929, as quoted in James P. Gilligan, “The Development of Policy and Administration of Forest Service Primitive and Wilderness Areas in the Western States” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1953), Volume II, Appendix A: 1–2.
- ¹⁴ See Hal K. Rothman, “‘A Regular Ding-Dong Fight’: Agency Culture and Evolution in the NPS-USFS Dispute, 1916–1937,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (May 1989).
- ¹⁵ H. H. Chapman, “National Parks, National Forests and Wilderness Areas,” *Journal of Forestry* 36, no. 5 (May 1938): 474.
- ¹⁶ Bob Marshall did this consciously. In 1934, when he worked in the Department of the Interior, he wrote to Secretary Ickes about “the prompt action required if we are to save the seven genuine wilderness areas in the National Forests which are in imminent danger of destruction. I would suggest that the U.S. Forest Service be asked for an immediate expression regarding the possibility of preserving these areas as wildernesses.” [Marshall, “Memorandum for the Secretary,” May 25, 1934, copy in Wilderness Society files and author’s files.] Marshall knew that any such request about the status of national forest wildlands, coming from Ickes, could only inflame intense Forest Service alarm about Ickes’ efforts to claim national forest lands for national parks.

In 1937 Marshall transferred to a senior position in the Forest Service, where he peppered his superiors with advice for keeping national forest primitive areas from becoming national parks, suggesting a strategy of strengthening their protection as national forest wilderness. Regarding Kings Canyon, Marshall reminded the assistant chief “I have been contending for over a year and half that if we didn’t put our house in order there would be a good chance we would lose this area.” [Marshall, “Memorandum for Mr. Granger [C.W. Granger],” June 12, 1939, attaching two earlier memos on the same point, National Archives, Record Group 95, U, Legislation, Kings Canyon

-
- National Park, copy in author's files.] At the same time, in his Wilderness Society persona, Marshall was party to endorsing the Olympic and Kings Canyon national parks. [Marshall, "Statement on Behalf of the Wilderness Society, *Mount Olympus National Park*, Hearings before the Committee on Public Lands (74th Congress, 2d Session) April 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, May 1 and 5, 1936: 276; and "Minutes, *Fifth Annual Meeting of the Council*," The Wilderness Society, March 25, 1939: 2, copies in Wilderness Society files and author's files. See also Gilligan, "The Development of Policy and Administration," Volume I, chapter IV; and James M. Glover, *A Wilderness Original: The Life of Bob Marshall* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1986): 199-200.]
- ¹⁷ My sources are materials in my files copied from the National Archives. See also Carsten Lien, *Olympic Battleground: The Power Politics of Timber Preservation* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991); Lary M. Dilsaver and William C. Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers, CA: Sequoia Natural History Association, Inc., 1990); Gilligan, "The Development of Policy and Administration;" and Rothman, "A Regular Ding-Dong Fight."
- ¹⁸ Representative Bertrand W. Gearhart, testimony in *John Muir-Kings Canyon National Park*, Hearings before the House Committee on the Public Lands (76th Congress, 1st Session) on H.R. 3794, March-April 1939: 163.
- ¹⁹ H.R. 3648 (76th Congress, 1st session) February 2, 1939. The Forest Service sought to trump this tactic by requesting that national forests also be subject to this legislation, but the Department of the Interior rebuffed their efforts. [Undated draft letter, Secretary of Agriculture to Vice-President, U.S. Senate; and "Memorandum for Files", C.M. Granger, Acting Chief, Forest Service, June 30, 1939, both in National Archives, Record Group 95, U, Legislation, Federal, S. 1188.]
- ²⁰ Bob Marshall to Harold Ickes, February 27, 1934: 3, National Archives, Record Group 79, File 601-12, Parks-General-Lands-General-Wilderness Areas, Pt. 1.
- ²¹ "Suggested Program for Preservation of Wilderness Areas," Robert Marshall to Harold Ickes, April 1934: 8, National Archives, Record Group 79, File 601-12, Parks-General-Lands-General-Wilderness Areas, Pt. 1.
- ²² The evolution of Forest Service wilderness policies, including the L-20 regulation and the U regulations, is told in greatest detail in Gilligan, "The Development of Policy and Administration."
- ²³ See note 16.
- ²⁴ Robert Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness," *The Scientific Monthly* (February 1930): 148. This is Marshall's classic manifesto for wilderness preservation.
- ²⁵ Robert Sterling Yard to Bernard Frank, September 13, 1937, as cited in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 3d edition, 1982): 206.
- ²⁶ Harvey Broome to Olaus Murie, August 1, 1940, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ²⁷ Robert Sterling Yard, "Saving the Wilderness," *The Living Wilderness* 5, whole no. 5 (July 1940): 2.
- ²⁸ Michael McCloskey, "The Wilderness Act of 1964: Its Background and Meaning," *Oregon Law Review* 45 (June 1966): 296.
- ²⁹ Quoted in Kenneth A. Reid, "Let Them Alone!," *Outdoor America* 5, no. 1 (November 1939): 6.
- ³⁰ John R. Bernard, "Forest Wilderness: How dedicated areas are being reclassified," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (January 1956): 26.
- ³¹ Reid, "Let Them Alone!" Aldo Leopold wrote to Reid: "I consider this treatise outstanding in the wilderness field. It finds a place in my permanent file." *Outdoor America* 5, no. 3 (January 1940): 8.
- ³² Swain, "Federal Conservation Policy," 130.
- ³³ Harvey Broome, quoted in "1906 ... Howard Clinton Zahniser ... 1964," *The Living Wilderness* 28, no. 85 (Winter-Spring 1964): 3.
- ³⁴ Olaus J. Murie, editorial, *The Living Wilderness* 10, no. 14 and 15 (December 1945): frontispiece.
- ³⁵ Personal communication from Ed Zahniser, Howard's youngest son. See also Ed Zahniser, ed., *Where Wilderness Preservation Began: Adirondack Writings of Howard Zahniser* (Utica, NY: North Country Books, 1992).
-

-
- ³⁶ H.R. 2142 (79th Congress, 1st Session).
- ³⁷ Benton MacKaye to Rep. Daniel K. Hoch, January 31, 1946, emphasis in original, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ³⁸ Benton MacKaye to Howard Zahniser, January 31, 1946, Wilderness Society files and author's files. A photo of Zahniser delivering MacKaye's draft bill to Hoch was printed in *The Living Wilderness* 11, no. 16 (March 1946): 5.
- ³⁹ C. Frank Keyser, *The Preservation of Wilderness Areas: An Analysis of Opinion on the Problem*, House Subcommittee on Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation, Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee Print 19 (August 24, 1949).
- ⁴⁰ Zahniser's extensive and masterful submission to the Library of Congress study provides a window into his thinking at that time. See "Memorandum for the Legislative Reference Service," March 1, 1949, in *National Wilderness Preservation Act*, Hearings before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. Senate (85th Congress, 1st Session.) on S. 1176, June 19 and 20, 1957: 165-197.
- ⁴¹ Howard Zahniser, "How Much Wilderness Can We Afford To Lose?," in *Wildlands in Our Civilization* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1964): 51. This address was also printed in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* (April 1951).
- ⁴² "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council," The Wilderness Society, September 3-7, 1955: 11, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ⁴³ Quote attributed to Rep. Wayne Aspinall, May 1954, included in a pamphlet, *What Is Your Stake in Dinosaur?* (San Francisco: Trustees for Conservation, 1954), author's files.
- ⁴⁴ One "price" of the Echo Park victory, in a fight entirely defined as about protecting the integrity of the then-existing units of the National Park System, was the inclusion of authorization for the Glen Canyon dam in the larger Colorado River Storage Project Act. Tragically, the magnificently wild Glen Canyon was not a unit of the National Park System; its loss, contrary to a common misunderstanding, was not a trade-off or compromise by the conservationists to gain removal of the Echo Park dam authorization. Rather, the wild values of Glen Canyon, little known in the early 1950s, were recognized far too late, by which time changing the definition of the fight was simply not politically feasible. Thus, the protection of Glen Canyon was never embraced by the broader coalition or its congressional champions *as part of the campaign* they had mobilized to defeat the Echo Park dam. This is not an excuse, simply an historical reality; the drowning of Glen Canyon—"the place no one knew"—became a potent symbol for the wilderness movement. See Mark W.T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), especially 55-56, and David Brower, footnote to Clinton P. Anderson, "Changing Public Opinion—As a Legislator Sees It," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 49, no. 9 (December 1964): 42.
- ⁴⁵ Howard Zahniser, "Wilderness Forever," address to the Seventh Biennial Wilderness Conference, Sierra Club, San Francisco, April 8, 1961, typescript in Wilderness Society files and author's files: 5.
- ⁴⁶ Charlotte E. Mauk, "Groundwork for Cooperation: The Four Wilderness Conferences," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (January 1956): 18.
- ⁴⁷ "The Need for Wilderness Areas," Extension of Remarks of Hon. Hubert H. Humphrey, *Congressional Record*, June 1, 1955, including the full text of Zahniser's speech. Quoted from a booklet reprint: 3, in author's files.
- ⁴⁸ Editorial, the *Oregon Journal*, April 15, 1956, reprinted in *The Living Wilderness* 21, no. 59 (Winter-Spring 1956-1957): 53.
- ⁴⁹ Howard Zahniser to George Marshall, April 3, 1956, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ⁵⁰ George Marshall to Howard Zahniser, April 11, 1956: 2, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ⁵¹ James L. Sundquist, *Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1968): 340, 358.
- ⁵² Senator Gordon Allott, *Preservation of Wilderness Areas*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. Senate (92d Congress, 2d Session) on S. 2453 and Related Wilderness Bills, May 5, 1972: 64.
-

-
- ⁵³ McCloskey, "The Wilderness Act of 1964": 298.
- ⁵⁴ Jack M. Hession, "The Legislative History of the Wilderness Act" (Masters thesis, San Diego State College, 1967). Hession interviewed Chairman Aspinall about his conversation with President Kennedy, at 207-208. See also "JFK Lauded Aspinall For Wilderness Bill," *Denver Post*, December 1, 1963.
- ⁵⁵ David Brower, "Wilderness and the Constant Advocate," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 49, no. 6 (September 1964): 3.
- ⁵⁶ Fred M. Packard to Howard Zahniser, April 13, 1951, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ⁵⁷ Howard Zahniser, "The People and Wilderness," *The Living Wilderness* 28, no. 86 (Spring-Summer 1964): 41.
- ⁵⁸ Howard Zahniser to Wayne Aspinall, July 19, 1963, Box 139, Wayne Aspinall Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Penrose Library, University of Denver. Copy in Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ⁵⁹ Howard Zahniser to Harvey Broome, July 19, 1963, Wilderness Society files and author's files.
- ⁶⁰ Sen. Henry M. Jackson to a constituent, March 15, 1963, Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, S. 2 S.4 (cont.), National Archives, Record Group 46, as cited in Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*: 9-10.
- ⁶¹ Howard Zahniser, "The People and Wilderness": 41. Three years earlier, in his address to the 1961 Sierra Club wilderness conference, Zahniser recollected the repeated successes of the conservationists: ". . . when we can reach the people of this country to present our concerns we are able to enlist them in support of our wilderness preservation efforts." He remarked that they would need to continue "such undertakings from our headquarters. But we must do more than this, and we must do it locally. We must use the newspapers and all local media of information and every available interested organization. We must extend our efforts throughout the land." "Wilderness Forever": 13.
- ⁶² Stewart M. Brandborg, "Executive Director's Report to Council 1966-67," Wilderness Society Papers, Western History Department, Denver Public Library, Box 2, as cited in Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*: 13-14.
- ⁶³ Sen. Frank Church, dialogue with Sen. Gordon Allott, *Preservation of Wilderness Areas*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. Senate (92d Congress, 2d session) on S. 2453 and Related Wilderness Bills, May 5, 1972: 65.
- ⁶⁴ Quoted in Ronald G. Strickland, "Ten Years of Congressional Review Under the Wilderness Act of 1964: Wilderness Classification Through Affirmative Action," (Unpublished dissertation, Georgetown University, 1976): 56, as cited by Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*: 21. Chairman Aspinall did not grasp how his and other wilderness bill opponents' success in insisting upon "affirmative action," with Congress having to pass a new law to designate additional wilderness areas, would turn out to empower local wilderness advocates. In enunciating this threat of use of his personal power as chairman to block such wilderness bills, he also could not foresee either his own electoral defeat (in a 1972 Democratic primary against a candidate backed by environmentalists across the country) or the erosion of the once-total power of committee chairmen to kill legislation. In fact, the San Rafael Wilderness, which Aspinall lamented was being established by the 1968 act at 143,000 acres, has subsequently been enlarged twice by amendments passed by later Congresses. In 1984 it was enlarged by a net of 1,570 acres and, in 1992, by another 46,400 acres. Using actual acreages, the Forest Service now reports the San Rafael Wilderness comprises 197,380 acres—contrasted to the 74,990 acres in the original 1930s primitive area. This experience is not unique. Congress has enlarged the Ventana Wilderness, California, in *four* separate laws since it was originally designated in 1969, the most recent signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. In the process, the old 1930s Ventana Primitive Area of 54,857 acres has been enlarged to a statutorily protected wilderness of some 240,000 acres.
- ⁶⁵ Rep. John P. Saylor, "The New Wilderness Bill," *Congressional Record* (November 7, 1963). Cited from a booklet reprint: 2, in author's files.
- ⁶⁶ David R. Brower, "De Facto Wilderness: What Is Its Place?," *Wildlands in Our Civilization*: 103, 109.
-

-
- ⁶⁷ Stewart M. Brandborg, “Acting Executive Director’s Report to the Council, 1963–64”: 7.
- ⁶⁸ Neil Rahm, speech, March 13, 1971, in records of Robert Morgan, as cited in Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*: 35.
- ⁶⁹ The citizen complaints about the flaws of RARE-I and the consideration of wilderness potential of roadless areas in subsequent Forest Service planning are summarized by the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in its report on the Endangered American Wilderness Act, U.S. House, *Designating Certain Endangered Public Lands for Preservation as Wilderness*, Report to accompany H.R. 3454, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, (95th Congress, 1st session), 27 July 1977, H. Rept. 95-540: 4–8.

- ⁷⁰ U.S. House, *Designating Certain Endangered Public Lands for Preservation as Wilderness*: 4–9.
- ⁷¹ Personal communication.
- ⁷² Leopold, “Why the Wilderness Society?”
- ⁷³ Leopold, “The Last Stand of the Wilderness”: 603.
- ⁷⁴ For detail on the precedents and expressed intent of both Congress and wilderness leaders, see my “Congress’s Practical Criteria for Designating Wilderness,” *Wild Earth* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 28–32. That Zahniser and his colleagues always intended this pragmatic approach is reflected in the fact that Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks and other formerly abused eastern areas had been listed by name for wilderness review in the original Wilderness Bill introduced in 1956.

The Forest Service “purity” doctrine evolved in the immediate post-Wilderness Act work by agency officials developing policy directives to field personnel to govern the agency wilderness review of primitive areas and the management of designated wilderness areas. A key player was Richard J. Costly, the Director of Recreation. See his recollections about this evolution, “An Enduring Resource,” *American Forests* (June 1972). Much of the content of this article was laid out a year earlier in a memo, Costly to Jack Deinema, April 19, 1971, copy in author’s files courtesy of Dennis Roth, whose *The Wilderness Movement* documents the purity issue in detail. See also Jeffrey P. Foote, “Wilderness—A Question of Purity,” Extension of Remarks of Hon. Bob Packwood, *Congressional Record* 119, no. 15 (January 29, 1973): pagination unknown.

- ⁷⁵ Sen. Frank Church, *Eastern Wilderness Areas*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. Senate (93rd Congress, 1st Session) on S. 316, 21 February 1973: 31.
- ⁷⁶ The history of the eastern wilderness fight is told by James Morton Turner, “Wilderness East: Reclaiming History,” *Wild Earth* 11, no.1 (Spring 2001): 19–27.
- ⁷⁷ The title “Eastern Wilderness Areas Act” originated informally with the bill championed by the leaders of the Senate and House Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs in 1972. This was a bill to designate additional wilderness areas on national forests in the East, South, and Midwest, and was the vehicle wilderness advocates devised in order to counter the Forest Service’s “wild areas east” proposal. The Senate Interior Committee approved this straightforward wilderness bill in December 1973, at which time the committee gave it the formal short title “Eastern Wilderness Areas Act” [S. Rept. 93-661]. Subsequently, that committee’s leaders and staff negotiated with their counterparts from the Senate Agriculture Committee, who had produced the rival wild areas east bill. The upshot was that the leaders of the two committees jointly introduced a new compromise bill in early May 1974. On the same day, the Senate Agriculture Committee formally reported that new bill, using the title “Eastern Wilderness Areas Act” [S. Rept. 93-803].

As a result, the bill passed by the Senate on May 31, 1974 was titled the “Eastern Wilderness Areas Act.” Subsequently, in the final days of a lame-duck Congress, the House Interior Committee reported its own somewhat different version of the legislation. Oddly, as reported the bill simply had no section 1, the usual place for a formal short title. Indeed, the bill language skipped directly from the enacting clause boilerplate to “Section 2,” obviously an error.

There is every reason to believe this was a simple clerical error in the hectic rush at the end of that congressional session. This is suggested by the fact that while the House bill as reported had no section 1 short title, that House Committee's own formal section-by-section analysis [H. Rept. 93-1599: 11] stated: "The short title of the bill is 'Eastern Wilderness Areas Act.'" This version of the bill passed the House on December 18, 1974, with the *Congressional Record* titling its transcript of the floor debate as "Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1974." Due to the press of time, the Senate accepted that version of the legislation on the following day. The President signed that bill into law on January 3, 1975 [P.L. 93-622], still missing its section 1 short title.

⁷⁸ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*: 189.

⁷⁹ "For a Wilderness Policy: To Protect from Unappreciative Encroachment Rare Primitive Areas Which Still Remain," *National Parks Bulletin* 7, no. 47 (January 1926): 8. Yard was the editor of this magazine.

⁸⁰ S. 4013, Subsection 2(e), (84th Congress, 2d Session) June 7, 1956: 12-13.

⁸¹ Howard Zahniser, "A Statement on the Wilderness Act," presented at a hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives on the Wilderness Act, May 7-9, 1962, typescript in Wilderness Society files and author's files: 15.

⁸² Frank Wheat, *California Desert Miracle: The Fight for Desert Parks and Wilderness*, (San Diego: Sunbelt Publications, 1999): esp. 303.

⁸³ Claus-M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2nd edition, 1987). See especially chapters 11 and 13.

⁸⁴ For a detailed journalistic account of that campaign, see Robert Cahn, *The Fight to Save Wilderness Alaska*, booklet published by the National Audubon Society (1982). For a first-hand account, see my "In the National Interest," *Sierra* 76, no. 1 (January-February 1991): 40. For a critical appraisal ten years after the law was enacted, see T. H. Watkins, "The Perils of Expedience," *Wilderness* 54, no. 191 (Winter 1990): 22.

⁸⁵ T. H. Watkins, "Alaska and the Weight of History," *Celebrating Wild Alaska: Twenty Years of the Alaska Lands Act*, booklet published by the Natural Resources Defense Council and Alaska Wilderness League (2000): frontispiece [reprinting 1990 essay].

⁸⁶ Brower, "Wilderness and the Constant Advocate": 2.

⁸⁷ Zahniser, "Wilderness Forever": 11-12.

⁸⁸ Zahniser, "Wilderness Forever," version in William Schwartz, editor, *Voices for the Wilderness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969): 106. This peroration is not in the typescript version previous cited.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This essay expands on a talk on wilderness history that I have been giving in various forms at wilderness conferences since the 1970s. I do not pretend to be a dispassionate historian of this subject. From 1967 onward I have been an active participant in national wilderness politics, first as a volunteer Sierra Club leader and Wilderness Society grassroots activist, then as a part-time employee of the Society and as a lobbyist for the Society in Washington D.C. as the first additions to the Wilderness System were before the Congress. In 1973, I moved to the Sierra Club, where I spent seventeen years, as Northwest Representative in the 1970s and then in the 1980s as Conservation Director and later Associate Executive Director for Conservation and Public Affairs. From 1977 to 1980 I was on special assignment as lobbying coordinator for the Alaska Coalition in the campaign to enact the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Where I was personally involved, I've used a first-person idiom in this history. Participant-written history is the most suspect kind, for it tempts the writer to burnish his or her own role and to settle old scores. Though hardly immune to these temptations, I have sought to be a careful student of the history of America's wilderness policy and wilderness movement, mining that history for lessons I have found extraordinarily useful in my own advocacy and in inspiring others. In striving to be a fair

and honest teller of this history, and in my own work for wilderness, I have sought to be an acolyte of Howard Zahniser, the scrupulously even-handed guiding genius of the Wilderness Act.

In the memories of those who were involved and in dusty documents lurk precedents, cautionary examples, splendid anecdotes, and an inspirational record of the advocacy of generations of wilderness advocates—most of them devoted volunteers, sung and unsung. My open offer to wilderness advocates today is to help your efforts by providing the best precedents and advice I can distill from the historical record to strengthen the case you must make for the additional wilderness areas you will secure as “an enduring resource” “for the permanent good of the whole people.” The same offer stands for the now thousands of devoted agency wilderness stewards to whose care this “enduring resource” is entrusted.

Through all of this history—and the history of wilderness preservation still being written—the greatest achievement is that of tens of thousands of spirited people who, as volunteers, have indeed fought, in Bob Marshall’s immortal phrase, “for the freedom of the wilderness.” Our National Wilderness Preservation System is, foremost, their gift to the Earth and to future generations.

Doug Scott
November 2003

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many colleagues for help and suggestions. Ed Zahniser, who literally grew up with the Wilderness Bill, has been a deep font of counsel and sharp editorial suggestions since the days when we shared an office; obviously great wordsmiths and editors run in his family. Andy Wiessner, a key congressional committee staffer in the 1970s and 1980s, helped improve my memory about the implementation of the Wilderness Act. Rupe Cutler, who originally hired me at The Wilderness Society and later did so much for wilderness as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture overseeing the Forest Service for Jimmy Carter, offered invaluable recollections that sharpened my account of RARE-II, even if we disagree on a few judgments. Mark Harvey, professor of history at North Dakota State University, whose forthcoming biography of Howard Zahniser I eagerly await, helped with a key reference when my own files failed me. Ann Lage, of the Regional Oral History Project of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, helped me track down obscure documents. James Morton Turner, a Ph.D. candidate in history at Princeton University who is doing intensive work on the history of implementation of the Wilderness Act, offered thoughtful suggestions on this manuscript.

I have been blessed to work at the side of extraordinary wilderness leaders, Stewart M. Brandborg, Harry Crandell, and Ernie Dickerman, of The Wilderness Society and Mike McCloskey of the Sierra Club; each taught me invaluable lessons of history and of our craft of wilderness strategy and lobbying. My great friends John McComb, Chuck Clusen, Bruce Hamilton, Tim Mahoney, and Brock Evans and many other co-workers have suffered my anecdotes and have deepened my understanding of wilderness politics more than they can know.

My appreciation, too, goes to Mike Matz and all our colleagues at the Campaign for Americas Wilderness, to Buck Parker and my colleagues at Earthjustice, and to the Pew Charitable Trusts.

SUGGESTED READINGS

An excellent, frequently updated database and reference source about the National Wilderness Preservation System and each of its units is www.wilderness.net.

Additional information about wilderness, current wilderness issues and opportunities for involvement are available at these web sites:

Campaign for Americas Wilderness www.leaveitwild.org

Concerning the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act www.wildernessforever.org

Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org/wildlands/

The Wilderness Society (TWS) www.wilderness.org

TWS's Wilderness Support Center www.wilderness.org/wsc/

Earthjustice www.earthjustice.org

The classic study of the intellectual evolution of the idea of wilderness is Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Nash provides a rich bibliography. The fourth edition is available in paperback. A second valuable resource on the history of the wilderness movement is Stephen Fox, *John Muir and the Sierra Club: The American Conservation Movement* (Boston: Little Brown, 1981). A University of Wisconsin Press paperback is available.

For the history of national forest wilderness after passage of the Wilderness Act (and considerable detail about RARE I and RARE II), see Dennis M. Roth, *The Wilderness Movement and the National Forests* (College Station, TX: Intaglio Press, 1988). Roth was the historian of the U.S. Forest Service.

A detailed history of nature preservation in the national parks and the tensions within the National Park Service over wilderness protection is found in Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

The Echo Park fight was a central influence in the history of the wilderness movement. It is splendidly recounted in Mark W. T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994). This is available in paperback from the University of Washington Press. Harvey is now completing a biography of Howard Zahniser.

There are three biographies of Aldo Leopold: Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Susan L. Flader, *Thinking Like A Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); and Marybeth Lorbiecki, *Aldo Leopold: A Fierce Green Fire* (Helena and Billings, MT: Falcon Publishing, 1996).

For Bob Marshall's biography, see James M. Glover, *A Wilderness Original: The Life of Bob Marshall* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1986).

Craig W. Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982) provides an overview of the history of the Wilderness Act and its early implementation.

The history of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 is recounted in Frank Wheat, *California Desert Miracle: The Fight for Desert Parks and Wilderness* (San Diego: Sunbelt Publications, 1999).

For the history of the fight over wilderness on the national forests of the East, see James Morton Turner, "Wilderness East: Reclaiming History," *Wild Earth* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 19-27. My "Congress's Practical Criteria for Designating Wilderness" appears in the same issue. An intensive study of the ecological and cultural history of one eastern wilderness is Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

A basic review of the Wilderness Act and its meaning, written soon after it was enacted, is Michael McCloskey, "The Wilderness Act of 1964: Its Background and Meaning," *Oregon Law Review* 45 (June 1966), pp. 288-321.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Let no man think that because a few foresters have tentatively formulated a wilderness policy, that the preservation of a system of wilderness remnants is assured in the National Forests. Do not forget that the good roads mania, and all forms of unthinking Boosterism that go with it, constitute a steam roller the like of which has seldom been seen in the history of mankind . . . And unless the wilderness idea represents the mandate of an organized, fighting and voting body of far-seeing Americans, the steam roller will win”

—Aldo Leopold
 “Conserving the Covered Wagon”
Sunset magazine, March, 1925

“In order to escape the whims of politics . . . [wilderness] areas . . . should be set aside by Act of Congress, just as National Parks are today set aside. This would give them as close an approximation to permanence as could be realized in a world of shifting desires.”

—Robert Marshall
 “Suggested Program for Preservation of Wilderness Areas,”
 Memorandum to Secretary Ickes, April, 1934

“We are part of the wilderness of the universe. Some of us think we see this so clearly that for ourselves, for our children, our continuing posterity, and our fellow men we covet with a consuming intensity the fullness of human development that keeps its contact with wildness.”

—Howard Zahniser
 “Wilderness: How Much Can We Afford to Lose?”
 Sierra Club Wilderness Conference, 1951

“POTENT CONSERVATIONIST PRESSURES: [Defeat of] the controversial Echo Park Dam is proof of the power of the new-style conservationist. Every legislator felt the sting of a campaign by citizens of every age and from every economic group . . . Congressmen no longer scoff at their power.”

—“What’s Happening in Washington”
 Lawyer’s Weekly Report
 April 9, 1956

“Development of local and regional leadership will afford an unequalled opportunity to gain public interest and involvement in the wilderness preservation effort. It would be difficult to conceive of a finer opportunity for carrying out an aggressive educational campaign for the wilderness purpose.”

—Stewart Brandborg
 Acting Executive Director’s Report
 The Wilderness Society, 1964

“The [Wilderness] Bill is of primary importance to westerners. The vanishing wilderness is yet a part of our western heritage. We westerners have known the wilds during our lifetimes, and we must see to it that our grandchildren are not denied the same rich experience during theirs. This is why the West needs a wilderness bill.”

—Senator Frank Church
Senate debate on the Wilderness Bill
Congressional Record, September 5, 1961

“For the very first time in years we are on an equal footing with the timber industry and the Forest Service with regard to our wilderness resource. The de facto wilderness areas no longer belong to them first as they have thought for so long.”

—Brock Evans
Sierra Club Northwest Conservation Brief
September, 1972

“The wild areas system would serve the Forest Service cause well. It sets two Senate committees to fighting over specific wilderness proposals; it confirms the Forest Service ‘purity’ argument; fragments the wilderness movement into regional factions with less influence, instead of a unified national movement . . . And it gives the Forest Service new hope for stopping the citizens’ wilderness proposals in every western state, from California to Montana.”

—George Alderson
Friends of the Earth
“Eastern Wilderness Crisis,” *Environmental Quality*
March, 1973

“As long as any of us serve in this House, we will cast no more important conservation votes than the votes on this Alaska lands bill. The simple fact is that Alaska . . . is our last chance to go about the job of conservation . . . with forethought, before a pattern of development has been fixed across the landscape piecemeal.”

—Rep. Morris K. Udall
Congressional Record
April 23, 1979

“The chief biologic and economic reason for preserving wilderness areas is that they do preserve the balance of nature; that they are the refuge of . . . predators . . . ; that they are great reservoirs of the serene order of nature, where things work the way they ought to. They are the right answers in the back of the book, from which we can get help in solving our problems OUTSIDE THEM, when we make a mess of things, as we usually do.”

—Donald Culross Peattie
Sierra Club Bulletin
January, 1956

“Let us try to be done with a wilderness preservation program made up of a sequence of overlapping emergencies, threats and defense campaigns! Let’s make a concerted effort for a positive program that will establish an enduring system of areas where we can be at peace and not forever feel that the wilderness is a battleground.”

—Howard Zahniser
“Wildlands in Our Civilization”
Sierra Club Wilderness Conference
March, 1951

“Across the country groups of citizens are working skillfully . . . preparing inventories of potential wilderness areas in various . . . jurisdictions. . . . working in task forces exhibiting impressive professional talents, they are delineating outstanding de facto wilderness opportunities, refining proposed boundaries, and drawing up detailed maps and supportive documentation.”

—Rep. John P. Saylor
Congressional Record
October 14, 1970

